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**HOW GOD WRITES HISTORY: A GRAMSCIAN ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICS OF
RELIGION AND NATURE IN THE WRITINGS, LIFE, AND LEGACY OF JOHN MUIR**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Art, Religious Studies

By

Daniel Jones

December 2018

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HOW GOD WRITES HISTORY: A GRAMSCIAN ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICS OF RELIGION AND NATURE IN THE WRITINGS, LIFE, AND LEGACY OF JOHN MUIR

Religious Studies

Missouri State University, December 2018

Master of Arts

Daniel Jones

ABSTRACT

Representations of John Muir, America's most famous environmentalist, and religion have been highly variegated. A mythological figure of American environmental politics, Muir and his legacy have been an ideological apparatus for presidents, environmentalists, and naturalists performing acts of identification for themselves and their country. Furthermore, religion and environmental scholars have often used Muir as a case study for what they call "nature religion." Lost in this myth-making labor are the politics of sacred spaces and national discourse. Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of *common sense* and *the intellectual*, which this thesis uses to analyze John Muir's poetics of American wilderness and role in relationship to the nineteenth-century genteel class. By contextualizing Muir's religion-making and myth-making practices using the critical insights of Gramsci and Gramscian analytic frames, this thesis studies the relationship of Muir's socio-historical context with the *common sense* that shaped his nation-making discourse. This is accomplished by the framing of religion using anti-essentialist and critical-contextual lenses. Next, this thesis situates Muir in relation to race, class, and ethnic positionality. Last, Muir oriented himself to the colonial relations of the American wilderness. Situating John Muir in contextual and complex relations of power challenges simplistic notions of religion and functions to reconsider the role of the historical production of Muir, or the Muir-myths. By situating John Muir as an intellectual of the American genteel class with settler common sense thought, this thesis demonstrates that John Muir's religious wilderness narratives constructed American colonial mythology.

KEYWORDS: John Muir, Gramsci, settler common sense, intellectual, religion, nature, rhetoric, discourse, myth, ritual, indigenous, America, colonialism, environmentalism

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Martha Finch, whose tireless labor as an advisor provided wisdom and patience throughout a project that has gone through a number of forms. Jack Llewellyn also served as an advisor and guide for navigating the territories of theory and practice in the academic study of religion. Kathy Pulley was to me as Jeanne Carr was to John Muir, a formative mentor. John Schmalzbauer was an encouraging and brilliant resource for my study of Muir in Victorian America. Vadim Putzu kept me focused and encouraged throughout the process of graduate school and this thesis. Mark Given guided my thesis and matriculation into the department. Lastly, thanks to Jane Terry for being Jane.

This thesis would not have been possible without the encouragement and guidance of a wonderful support group. My wife, Stephanie, has been my partner in graduate school and in life, without whom this would not have been possible. My parents and siblings have stood behind me and supported me throughout my educational journey.

The digital community of religious studies has shaped me beyond the boundaries of this paper. I would like to recognize the following individuals for being friendly and formative interlocutors: Craig Martin, Russell McCutcheon, Stacie Swan, Matthew Baldwin, Bron Taylor, Brett Miller, David Bailey, Kerry Mitchell, Donovan Schaeffer, Suzanne Owen, Greg Johnson, Tripp Hudgins, Nathan Loewen, Stephen Hatch, Evan Berry, Randy Haluza-Delay, Lucas Johnson, Matt Sheedy, Kevin Schilbrack, Tenzan Eaghll, Bo Eberle, Hollis Phelps, Aaron Hughes, Leslie Dorrough Smith, Teemu Taira, Pat McCullough, Travis Cooper, Steven Ramey, and Brad Stoddard. I have surely forgotten someone, and the deficiencies of this thesis are solely my own.

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INTRODUCTION: SEEKING FERTILE GROUND: CONSTRUCTING A GRAMSCIAN ANALYSIS OF JOHN MUIR, RELIGION, AND NATURE IN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS HISTORY

American novelist, environmentalist, and historian Wallace Stenger once said that “a place is not fully a place until it has a poet. Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada had [John] Muir.”¹ Before John Muir became an American cultural icon, his story begins in the industrial hub of Dunbar, Scotland, where he was born on April 21, 1838. Much of Muir’s life and works were shaped by the culture and politics of his native country. It may have pleased Muir—an avid and acclaimed hiker and mountaineer—that my introduction to his legacy was through my experiences as a climber exploring America’s stone offerings and preservation spaces. I was well aware of the reverence with which Muir was regarded by many Americans who have made the outdoors their playgrounds and their “places of worship.” It is common to hear people say that nature is their religion or use a number of terms common to religious discourse to describe climbing and its spaces; climbing has been referred to by friends as “moving meditation,” mountains and boulder fields as churches and cathedrals. The history behind America’s intersecting discourses of religion and nature has deep and wide roots. Muir’s life has become entangled in many American stories of self-understanding and expressions of identity. America’s so-called wild spaces, and the rhetoric for their preservation, are so commonly adorned with Muir’s image and words that one may scarcely visit them, as over 300 million people did last

¹ Quoted in Jonathan Spaulding, *Ansel Adams and the American Landscape: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 367. Stenger said that Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada had two poets: Muir and the photographer Ansel Adams. This was said at a dedication ceremony for the naming of Mount Ansel Adams in Yosemite National Park. For a similar quote, see Wallace Stenger, “A Sense of Place,” 1992; reprinted at http://www.pugetsound.edu/files/resources/7040_Stegner,%20Wallace%20%20Sense%20of%20Place.pdf.

year, without being introduced to “the father of the National Parks.”² American presidents, canonical authors, artists, scientists, and environmental intellectuals have framed Muir as one of America’s most important figures.³ In the early 1890s, Muir was instrumental in founding the Sierra Club, one of the most influential and well-known environmental organizations. Muir was also known for changing glaciological science and botanical renown.⁴ Muir’s legacy has resided among the vast collection of individuals, such as Aldo Leopold and Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose literature and advocacy discourses have intersected religion and nature in American literary and cultural production.⁵

However, like America itself, nature and religion are not concepts that are consistent, uncontested categories without historical production. And despite attempts to chart a “nature religion” phenomenon—with Muir as a primary progenitor—in American history, there are significant complications in representing this concept apart from the development of American and transatlantic Christianity, especially Anglo-Protestantism; especially problematic is the ease with which scholars and adherents of “nature religion,” referring to the relationship of super natural beings’ impact on shaping daily practices as they involve “nature,” claim Amerindian peoples as necessarily in agreeance with Western religious environmentalists. For instance, a preeminent voice in nature religion scholarship, Catherine Albanese, situates nature religion as an orienting process including “belief systems, ritual forms, and guidelines for everyday life,”

² *Frequently Asked Questions* <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/faqs.htm>.

³ A short but proper introduction to John Muir’s influence may be found in the Sierra Club’s website. “Who Was John Muir,” Sierra Club.org, https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/about/default.aspx.

⁴ Asa Gray, a Harvard University scientist and friend of Muir, called Muir “the first botanist in the world.” Quoted in Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 204. Asa Gray was representative of the transatlantic scientist of high stature with an affection for theologically inflected natural science that dominated Victorian-era science. Despite discourses of doubt and “secularity,” there was a great number of scientists who spoke authoritatively without separating God from scientific narratives.

⁵ By cultural production, I intend to mean that which gets cultivated and normalized through social production such as naturalist literature.

with nature at its symbolic center.⁶ Albanese intends to speak in her work of “American nature religion,” but like many colonial narratives that have come before hers, indigenous religion fits a model cast by colonial religious hegemony. The narratives of “America’s wilderness” are replete with iterations and assumptions about the “stuff” of nature, religion, and personhood that need to be historicized and understood under the critical gaze of postcolonial and critical-contextual lenses.⁷ Albanese states that nature religion is “the religion of nature and its devotees”⁸ and admits that expansion and nationalism have coincided with it, but Albanese also assumes that indigenous people are devotees par excellence.⁹ Albanese has admitted that there is not a parallel concept of “nature” that is shared by Euro-American societies with Native American societies.¹⁰ Nature, religion, wilderness; these terms are all what discourse analysts call floating signifiers. That is to say, there are no non-discursive objects to which these terms point, yet they have histories replete with political, racial, and colonial utility.¹¹

So how do these terms come to operate? How have they come to be defined? Why is it so important that they lack reference to concrete objects? These questions are central to exploring the relationality between descriptions of the world and power. When one abandons the notion that terms such as religion, nature, and even America are given, timeless concepts, a complex history of political constructions of current and historical realities becomes clearer. Moreover, such an endeavor reveals that even noble projects such as environmentalism have histories that cannot be separated from the historical conditions that allowed their production. American

⁶ Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America: From The Algonkian Indians to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 6-7.

⁷ I am borrowing the term “critical-contextual” from Bruce Grelle’s work, *Antonio Gramsci and the Question of Religion: Ideology, Ethics, and Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2017), 66, 75, 136.

⁸ Albanese, *Nature Religion in America*, 15.

⁹ Catherine Albanese, *Reconsidering Nature Religion* (Harrisberg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ For a study treating all three terms, see Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

preservation history, and the religious discourse that gave it much of its lifeblood, cannot be separated from colonial and class struggle.¹² John Muir has served as poet, prophet, and intellectual for many major environmental groups, actions, and monuments.¹³ This fact has important implications for politics, policy, and the ethics of national identity representation given that Muir's legacy functions often to justify them.¹⁴

John Muir proclaimed that God was found in the wilderness, and that the mountains refreshed the soul and body alike. Muir invited his readers to "be lost in wonder and praise" and go into the Sierra Mountains and forests to see "how God writes history." While recognizing the utility of timber, Muir contested that it was a national, moral responsibility to preserve and experience wild spaces.¹⁵ Previous scholarship on Muir has not gone far enough to explore the relationship between Muir's religiously inflected discourse and legacy and the politics of colonial expansion. For instance, according to Muir, despite the "big trees" (Giant Sequoia) belonging to the whole world, they were under the sovereignty and care of the American republic.¹⁶ Somewhere between "Satanic" senators and industry sinners lay the federal and civilian soul of America, which, for the "good men of every nation," had been "invited to heaven, and may well be allowed in America."¹⁷ By "invited," Muir was speaking of immigrants. And yet, what about those indigenous nations that came before and were now struggling under

¹² It should be mentioned that gender issues are also central to the history of environmentalism. Although they will not be treated in this thesis, it is necessary to mention them as an important factor.

¹³ Kerry Mitchell, *Spirituality and the State: Managing Nature and Experience in America's National Parks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

¹⁴ As William Cronon warns us, our scholarly narratives are also entangled projects that must be held reflexively and critically: "Narrative succeeds to the extent that it hides the discontinuities, ellipses, and contradictory experiences that would undermine the intended meaning of its story. Whatever its overt purpose, it cannot avoid a covert exercise of power: it inevitably sanctions some voices while silencing others. A powerful narrative reconstructs common sense to make the contingent seem determined and the artificial seem natural." Cronon, though uneasy with heavy theory, is aware that historical narratives are politically efficacious. William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 4 (1992): 1349-50.

¹⁵ John Muir, *Our National Parks* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1901), 1, 59.

¹⁶ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 365.

¹⁷ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 363.

the American Republic? In conversations regarding the exigency of the Anthropocene employing heroes such as John Muir to inspire a more sustainable future, the colonialist politics of nature (and preservation) can often get lost.¹⁸ As we see in Roderick Frazer Nash's now classic work, *wilderness*, it turns out, has a history, and a very political one at that.¹⁹ The discourse of religion, too, has shaped the intersection of cultural, ecological, and national politics, as the work of Evan Berry has demonstrated.²⁰ Moreover, as historians Jennifer Graber and Tisa Wenger have shown, discourses of religion have shaped colonial cultural, policy, and legal relations.²¹

If religion has so powerfully shaped American cultural and legal discourses, then we need analytical tools and categories that will aid us in analyzing the role of ideology, narrative, and rhetoric in negotiating power relations and for re-describing religion in American cultural politics, affecting how Americans have conceived of place, religion, nature, and nationalism. Marxist philosopher and political theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) has provided analysts with concepts such as *hegemony*, *common sense*, and *the intellectual* to analyze the role of social formation and power relations. In applying a Gramscian analysis to the life and legacy of John Muir, this thesis demonstrates Muir's function as a myth-making, religious intellectual of American expansionism. A critique of the concept of 'nature religion' in Muir scholarship addresses the potentialities of this term as a mystification of the nineteenth-century, Victorian,

¹⁸ For an edited volume wrestling with the questions of politics, categories, and preservation, see Ben A. Minteer and Stephen J. Pyne, eds., *After Preservation: Saving America in an Age of Humans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹⁹ Roderick Frazer Nash's classic study, *Wilderness in the American Mind*, 5th ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), first published in 1967, has long established that wilderness discourse has shaped Americans' self-representations and ethnic and land politics.

²⁰ Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

²¹ Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West* (New York: Oxford, 2018); Tisa Wenger, *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Tisa Wenger *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

genteel, Anglo-Euro-American historical-contextual conditions and particularities of Muir's thought and activities situated in his settler colonial subjectivity within the politics of American expansion, including the environmentalism in which he engaged.²²

Settler colonialism plays a central role in the claims that I am making in this thesis, so I must explain here what I mean by the term for my analysis. I use the frame of settler colonialism to situate Muir within the Euro-American expansion and dispossession of indigenous sovereignty. Historian Margaret Jacobs frames settler colonialism in North America as the structures that performed “a distinct form of colonialism that involved sustained migration and permanent settlement by European-descended families, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and the development of elaborate institutions that allowed settlers and their descendants to gain numerical and political dominance.”²³ Patrick Wolfe contends that the “primary logic of settler colonialism is [indigenous] elimination.”²⁴ Colonialism relies on elimination in a myriad of ways: land dispossession, cultural and political representation, sovereignty. The main focus of this thesis is on the myth-making activities in which Muir engaged that favored U.S. possession and sovereignty over “wilderness” at the cost of indigenous dispossession. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history of American settler colonialism is historically entangled with resource management, including that of the numerous facets of Department of the Interior with which Muir was involved or that he engaged.²⁵ The Department of the Interior has included the

²² I recognize that “colonial” may refer to the pre-republic days of the United States. In indigenous and settler studies literature, settler colonialism refers to the dynamic of the transit of empire, which I will discuss in detail below. Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 570.

²³ Margaret D. Jacobs, “Seeing Like a Settler Colonial State,” *Modern American History* 1, no. 2 (2018): 259.

²⁴ Patrick Wolfe, “Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race,” *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 3 (2001): 867.

²⁵ For example, Muir authorized mineral sales between the State of California and Daanawáak people of Alaska. Daniel Lee Henry, *Across the Shaman's River: John Muir, The Tlingit Stronghold, and the Opening of the North* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2017), 209.

Bureau of Indian Affairs, the National Park System, the U.S. Geological Survey, The Bureau of Mines, the Bureau of Reclamation, and temporarily, the Bureau of Education.²⁶ In this space of federal resource management, along with American cultural production (i.e., literature, art, folktales, rituals), which provided the rhetoric of settler mythology, we find Muir's story entangled with the broader history of American settler colonialism. Muir supported the project of settler colonialism, dressing it up with religious nature writing and frontier mythology in popular publications, starting in 1866 and continuing to his death in 1914, as well as his letters and books published posthumously. For example, the posthumously published *Steep Trails* reads,

After witnessing the bad effect of homelessness, developed to so destructive an extent in California, it would reassure every lover of his race to see the hearty home-building going on here and the blessed contentment that naturally follows it. Travel-worn pioneers, who have been tossed about like boulders in flood-time, are thronging hither as to a kind of terrestrial heaven, resolved to rest. They build, and plant, and settle, and so come under natural influences. When a man plants a tree he plants himself. Every root is an anchor, over which he rests with grateful interest, and becomes sufficiently calm to feel the joy of living. He necessarily makes the acquaintance of the sun and the sky. Favorite trees fill his mind, and, while tending them like children, and accepting the benefits they bring, he becomes himself a benefactor. He sees down through the brown common ground teeming with colored fruits, as if it were transparent, and learns to bring them to the surface. What he wills he can raise by true enchantment. With slips and rootlets, his magic wands, they appear at his bidding. These, and the seeds he plants, are his prayers, and, by them brought into right relations with God, he works grander miracles every day than ever were written.²⁷

As reflected here, American wilderness mythology, of which Muir has been a prominent figure, relied on narratives of settler sovereignty, innocence, and benefit. American wilderness writing has functioned as a “transit of empire,” as a production of settler colonial narratives present in the “intimacy, kinship, and identity” of “everydayness” in settler relationships with

²⁶ “History of the Department of the Interior,” *Who We Are*. <https://www.doi.gov/whoweare/history/>

²⁷ John Muir, *Steep Trails*, ed. William Frederic Badé (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), 140-141. *Steep Trails* was published posthumously by Muir's primary editor, William F. Badé.

indigenous humans and nonhumans in North America.²⁸ Empire shaped what officially counted as natural, as wilderness, and as religion; these colonialist mythologies literally and physically shaped the fate of American spaces and the resources and people within them. Settler colonialists materialized the colonial common sense of settler sovereignty in their relationships with the land and indigenous people. The *taken-for-grantedness* of settler dominion and political and cultural representation and the naturalization of settler sovereignty shaped the ‘everyday lives’ of both settler and indigenous realities. Given Muir’s settler context, how scholars make claims about Muir’s religious affiliation may in fact cover important social and historical dynamics of erasure. Settler colonialism relies on the space between force and consent, or violence and hegemony; hegemony, which Muir became a master of mythologizing, serves to mask the conditions of dominance.

Machines and Flowers, Books and Mountains: A Biography of the Genteel John Muir

On April 21, 1838, John Muir was born in the industrial city of Dunbar, Scotland. Muir’s merchant family lived in “one of the finest properties in Dunbar,” according to an article published by John Muir’s Birthplace, a trust set up to preserve Muir’s childhood Scotland home. The house had been built a hundred years prior (circa 1730-40) to its acquisition by the Muir family. Daniel Muir, John’s father, bought the building outright as a result of his “business acumen.” The house came with a commercial garden, rental space, a stable and coach house, and servants’ rooms.²⁹ An advertisement for Muir’s childhood home in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* on December 17, 1821, stated that this home was “well calculated for the

²⁸ I recognize that the indigenous human and nonhuman were not always separated in settler colonial ideologies. I also recognize that not all societies divide humans from nonhumans in the same fashion, ontologically, as is common in Euro-American societies, or what gets called ‘the West.’

²⁹ This is from an advertisement published by the John Muir Birthplace.

accommodation of a genteel and numerous family.”³⁰ Daniel Muir was a grain merchant in a time when Dunbar was among the richest agricultural regions in the entirety of the United Kingdom.³¹ However, the economic security that grain merchants had did not quell the anxiety and discontent of Daniel’s theological struggles with Scottish Christianity, which was important to Scottish social life. Daniel was often discontent with many of the offshoots of the Calvinist churches in Scotland; he considered Episcopalianism as an alternative but eventually settled on following the Campbellite Movement, known for its emotional devotion, unification rhetoric, and biblical literalism.³² The Campbellite Movement, also known as the Restoration Movement, was a nineteenth-century offshoot of Scotch-Irish Protestantism that desired to return to the original New Testament church’s praxis and theology.³³ The founding figures, father and son Thomas and Alexander Campbell, argued that all believers may share communion and that baptism was for adults.³⁴

In 1849, when John was eleven years old, the Muir family embarked on the long journey across the Atlantic, finally settling in Marquette County, Wisconsin, where Daniel utilized his business and agricultural acumen to purchase a farm. Originally, Daniel and Ann Gilrye Muir had their sights on the United Province of Canada (now, Ontario), a colony loyal to the British crown and a center of the Campbellite movement. However, the sail to North America produced conversations about agricultural potential in the United States that convinced Daniel to settle the family in the upper Midwest of the United States.³⁵ Later, upon witnessing a display of the

³⁰ “John Muir’s Birthplace Fact Sheet,” https://www.jmbt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/1_04.pdf. Accessed, 7/16/2018.

³¹ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 23.

³² Seven J. Holmes, *The Young John Muir*, 29; Andrew T.N. Muirhead, *Reformation, Dissent and Diversity: The Story of Scotland’s Churches, 1560-1960* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 213.

³³ Muirhead, *Reformation, Dissent and Diversity*, 213.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 44-45.

aurora borealis in Wisconsin, Daniel would proclaim, “Hush and wonder and adore, for surely this is the clothing of the Lord himself.”³⁶ Like Dunbar, Wisconsin offered the Muir family an opportunity to secure their fortunes, and the Wisconsin farm created a space for Daniel to assert his stern paternal style over his family. Muir’s financial position was not the only driving force behind the Muirs’ move; his affinity for the Campbellite movement inspired his theological positions and political demands. Alexander Campbell, the movement’s leader, found within America the rights of citizenship afforded to him were priceless.³⁷ Daniel’s rebellious spirit was forged in Scotland, which was engulfed by a church culture of rebellion, as evinced by the Erskinians (Secessionist church), and possibly shared by John’s quiet tempered mother, Ann Gilrye Muir. Ann Gilrye’s family identified with their roots in the Scottish Presbyterian Covenantors, a group that had rebelled against King James’s successor, Charles I.³⁸ Ann’s presence was minimal in John’s own accounts, although her father, David Gilrye (a butcher), taught John Muir how to read and appreciate animal life at a young age.³⁹ Historian Donald Worster argues that Scotland gave Muir several conflicting worldviews built on different theologies and philosophies, such as the contours of church practices and the relationship of human and nonhuman animals. It was the anti-imperialism of the Campbellite Movement that brought Daniel to North America, however.⁴⁰ Wisconsin provided John Muir opportunities to demonstrate his intellect and ingenuity to his neighbors and local teachers. This resulted in Muir’s formal education at the University of Wisconsin, following the recognition he received at a Wisconsin state science fair. Muir was noticed by an educator by the name of Jeanne Carr

³⁶ Daniel Muir, quoted in Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 53. I witnessed this during summers as a child in the Manotwish Waters area of northern Wisconsin. It is a spectacular sight.

³⁷ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 39.

³⁸ Muirhead, *Reformation, Dissent, and Diversity*, 32-33.

³⁹ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 29-30.

⁴⁰ John Muir, *The Story of my Boyhood and Youth*, 218-220.

whose husband Ezra was a professor at the University of Wisconsin; over the years the Carr family introduced Muir to some of his most important contacts, including Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Following a stint in Canada (1863-1866, which may have been Muir dodging the draft during the Civil War, like his brother Daniel Jr.), Muir found his way south to Indiana, where he acquired work at a railroad factory.⁴¹ Muir's time in Indiana was spent botanizing, collecting specimens in the woods around the factory when not working as a machinist. In 1867, when Muir was twenty-nine years old, a file was projected off of a belt, puncturing his right eye and almost blinding him in the process. It was Muir's connection to prominent families that gained him access to an eye specialist who saved his sight.⁴² He described his experience as being similar to the Pauline conversion narrative found in the New Testament in the Book of Acts, chapter nine: "like a resurrection," Muir wrote to Jeanne Carr, "I have risen from the grave, the cup has been removed, and I am alive."⁴³ When Muir regained his sight, he decided to leave industry behind, saying that he "made haste with all my heart, bade *adieu* to all thoughts of inventing machinery, and determined to devote the rest of my life to studying the inventions of God."⁴⁴ Following the accident, Muir traveled to South America to become the next Alexander von Humboldt. Though Alexander von Humboldt may be largely forgotten by many, he was Muir's idol; von Humboldt contributed greatly to the disciplines of American science and literature.⁴⁵ He significantly influenced Muir's ecological view of nature, tying all natural

⁴¹ James B. Hunt, *Restless Fires: Young John Muir's Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf in 1867-68* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2012), 30.

⁴² Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 23. Dr. James Davie Butler, professor of New Testament and classical languages at the University of Wisconsin, introduced John to the prominent Merrill family of Indianapolis, Indiana. This gave Muir the medical and social care that he needed to continue his botanical lifestyle.

⁴³ Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 52.

⁴⁴ Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 52.

⁴⁵ Laura Daassow Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) Kindle edition, Location 63. Alexander von Humboldt shaped American science,

sciences together under the same unifying reality. Both von Humboldt and botanist Mungo Park momentarily impacted Muir's scientific outlook.⁴⁶

In 1866 Jeanne Carr sent Muir a copy of *The Stone-Mason of Saint Point: A Village Tale*, written by Catholic historian and poet Alphonse de Lamartine. *The Stone-Mason* was filled with philosophies of humankind's relationship with nature, specifically that humans gain wisdom through "personal engagement with it."⁴⁷ As influential as Lamartine was on Muir, Muir opted to only bring Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Robert Burns's poems, a New Testament, and the very large 1862 edition of *Class-Book of Botany* on his formative but failed journey to reach and botanize in South America (1867-68), what he dubbed *the thousand-mile journey*.⁴⁸ Departing on September 2, 1867, Muir trekked through the Reconstruction-era South, eventually reaching Cedar Key, Florida, on October 23, 1867. Along this journey Muir contracted malaria.⁴⁹ He would go as far as Cuba before diverting his journey to California.

Muir's thousand-mile journey from Indiana to Cuba was formative in shaping his conceptions of life, death, and humanity's position in the order of the cosmos.⁵⁰ The journey molded Muir's understanding of the illegitimacy of "Lord Man's" rule over nonhumans and its fragility.⁵¹ However, Muir's views on race were not drastically altered by his experiences while traveling across the Reconstruction-era South. Muir wrote on September 26, 1867, about a group of African-Americans he encountered in Athens, Georgia: "[they are] well trained and are

as well as the minds of Edger Allen Poe, Franz Boas, Walt Whitman, Washington Irving, Fredric Church, Louis Agassiz (another of Muir's friends and heroes), and Thomas Jefferson.

⁴⁶ Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 25.

⁴⁷ Bonnie Johanna Gisel, *Kindred & Related Spirits: The Letters of John Muir and Jeanne Carr* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001), 24; Hunt, *Restless Fire*.

⁴⁸ John Muir, *The Writings of John Muir: The Story of My Boyhood, A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916); Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 60.

⁴⁹ Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 142.

⁵⁰ Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 4.

⁵¹ Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 153.

extremely polite and are extremely polite. When they come in sight of a white man on the road, off go their hats, even at a distance of forty or fifty yards, and they walk bare-headed until he is out of sight.”⁵² “Well trained” reflects a common attitude of white settlers in the nineteenth century that focused on the genteel values of self-discipline and decorum. Muir’s expression here contrasts with his impressions from the previous day’s journal, written while he was traveling down the Chattahoochee River on the southern Alabama and Georgia border; Muir took note of the economic situation: “Cotton is the principal crop hereabouts, and picking is now going on merrily.”⁵³ In that journal entry Muir referred to “negroes” he saw picking cotton as “easygoing and merry, making a great deal of noise and doing little work. One energetic white man, working with a will, would easily pick as much cotton as half a dozen Sambos and Sallies.”⁵⁴ Upon his arrival in Gainesville, Florida, on October 13, 1867, Muir journaled about an experience involving “the best-lighted and most primitive” abode, which was located in a secluded patch of pine trees on the outskirts of Gainesville. The area was inhabited by local residents. Muir wrote that he used caution as he approached to ensure that the inhabitants were not “robber negroes.”⁵⁵ Muir reused this term again on October 19 justifying his decision to forego lighting a campfire, “for fear of discovery by robber negroes, who, I was warned, would kill a man for a dollar or two.”⁵⁶ Moreover, his emphasizing that a “very civil negro” found him a night’s lodging reflects

⁵² John Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, ed. William Frederic Badè (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 52. Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 94. Muir described Athens with very genteel sensibilities: “a remarkably beautiful and aristocratic town, containing many classic and magnificent mansions of wealthy planters, who formerly owned large negro-stocked plantations in the best cotton and sugar regions farther south. Unmistakable marks of culture and refinement, as well as wealth, were everywhere apparent. This is the most beautiful town I have seen on the journey, so far, and the only one in the South that I would like to revisit.”

⁵³ Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, 49.

⁵⁴ Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, 51.

⁵⁵ Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, 105-106. Muir described the inhabitants like this: “In the center of this globe of light sat two negroes. I could see their ivory gleaming from the great lips, and their smooth cheeks flashing off light as if made of glass. Seen anywhere but in the South, the glossy pair would have been taken for twin devils, but here it was only a negro and his wife at their supper.”

⁵⁶ Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, 110.

the symbolic violence largely ingrained into Anglo-American assumptions about the normality of African-Americans: civility as the exception.⁵⁷ These comments reflect the stereotypical depictions of African-American, slaves, and indigenous people present in nineteenth-century genteel Protestant discourse. Muir's later writings are also silent about Charles Young, the National Parks' first African American (Acting) Superintendent, located at the Sequoia and General Grant (now known as Kings Canyon) National Parks, as well as Young's 9th Calvary (whom he led) that escorted President Theodore Roosevelt on his infamous camping trip with Muir.⁵⁸ Historian David P. Kilroy notes that Theodore Roosevelt "saw Young as the epitome of Black manhood."⁵⁹ While Young returned the sentiment, Muir made no mention of Young's presence as he does genteel mountaineers in *Steep Trails*.⁶⁰ Besides being largely silent on the realities of slavery, Muir appears unmoved during his stay in Murphy, North Carolina, in 1867 by the Jacksonian removal of the Cherokee Nation from the North Carolina and Georgia area in the 1830s: "All day among the groves and gorges of Murphy with Mr. Beale. [I] was shown the site of Camp Butler, where General Scott had his headquarters when he removed the Cherokee Indians to a new home in the West."⁶¹ For modern readers, Muir's description would likely appear neutral in light of the extreme violence of Cherokee removal. He was more concerned about the "forest gardens of our Father [God]."⁶² In the same 1867 journals, Muir contrasted the clean houses of [white] settlers to the "uncouth transition establishments from the savage

⁵⁷ Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, 53.

⁵⁸ "Buffalo Soldiers: Guardians of California National Parks,"

https://www.nps.gov/goga/planyourvisit/upload/folder-buffalo-2015_final_web.pdf; "Patrolling Sequoia National Park," <https://www.nps.gov/prsf/learn/historyculture/patrolling-sequoia-national-park.htm>.

⁵⁹ David P. Kilroy, *For Race and Country: The Life and Career of Colonel Charles Young* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 71.

⁶⁰ Muir, *Steep Trails*, 45-48.

⁶¹ John Muir, *The Writings of John Muir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916), 280. This is from Muir's September, 1867 journals.

⁶² Muir, *The Writings of John Muir*, 277

wigwams to clumsy but clean log castles of thrifty pioneers.”⁶³ A common theme in Muir’s writings on Indians is their uncleanliness, which will appear in more detail later in this thesis. Muir makes similar comments about a couple who provided the traveling Muir with a dinner at their “hut.” In his journaling outside of Gainesville, Florida, Muir considered having malaria and being dirty as equally afflicting.⁶⁴ For Muir’s genteel enculturation, race, class, and human nature were entangled discourses.

In 1868, Muir traveled through Central America to California at the behest and patronage of Jeanne Carr, who desired to see Muir’s scientific and literary gifts applied to the Sierra Nevada mountain range. He arrived in San Francisco with no intention of staying, but it was the Yosemite Valley in the Sierra Nevadas (over three and a half hours east of San Francisco by today’s driving standards) that ultimately drew him away from his quest to South America to follow in von Humboldt’s footsteps.⁶⁵

Muir’s lifelong Emersonian habit of journaling continued during his time in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, something encouraged by genteel society.⁶⁶ Upon arriving in Yosemite in June 1868, Muir first earned his livelihood working as a shepherd. Echoing Wordsworth, he wrote in his journal, “Everything turns into religion, all the world seems a church, and the mountains altars.”⁶⁷ Religion-making became the tone of Muir’s wilderness advocacy, which spanned across another fifty years until his death in 1914. During his lifetime, Muir’s journaling turned into the articles and books that rivaled Emerson’s, a man who claimed that Muir was “more wonderful than Thoreau.”⁶⁸ Muir’s political and literary labor shaped American

⁶³ Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 88.

⁶⁴ Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, 109-110.

⁶⁵ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 150. Muir is said to have been impatiently ready to go to the Yosemite Valley as soon as his boat arrived in San Francisco in 1868.

⁶⁶ Hunt, *Restless Fires*, 60.

⁶⁷ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 161.

⁶⁸ John Swett, “John Muir,” *The Century* 46, no 1 (May 1893): 120.

environmental and wilderness philosophies permanently, although he did not stay in the wilderness forever. Through his marriage on April 14, 1880, to Louie Strentzel (introduced to Muir by Jeanne Carr), whose father self-identified the family as “worshippers of nature,” Muir benefited from the fortunes of his in-laws’ Martinez, California, ranch and, to a large extent, from the late nineteenth-century agricultural changes in the California environment.⁶⁹ Wine grapes and other fruits brought the Strentzels renown across California.⁷⁰ Muir continued this agricultural work.⁷¹ As a result of his agricultural fortunes, he gained financial freedom, allowing him to spend the next several decades “tramping” around the Sierras, the Southwest, the upper northwest of North America, and Alaska and eventually extending his travels internationally.

From years of networking with intellectuals transplanted into (especially) the Stanford area, Muir was active in shaping California public school pedagogical cultures as well as contributing to environmental advocacy. Muir’s relationship with John Swett, the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction (1862-67) and founder of California public education, his wife Mary, and their family (whom Muir lived with during the winters of 1875, 1876, and 1877) is instructive for understanding Muir’s contribution to the intellectual scene in the late nineteenth century.⁷² Mary served as an editor for Muir.⁷³ The Swetts encouraged Muir to reach out to audiences larger than their dinner parties; they engaged Muir in public policy and education, also.⁷⁴ The two Johns were awarded honorary degrees from the University of

⁶⁹ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 277, 283; Mark A. Foley, “A Paradise in the Alhambra Valley: John Muir and the Strentzels,” in *John Muir in Historical Perspective*, ed. Sally M. Miller (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 26-29. Worster rightly notes that this agrarian aspect of Muir’s legacy is often lost on his wilderness followers. Foley fortifies the notion that Muir benefited from the social and financial gains of family agriculture.

⁷⁰ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 281. The Muir-Hanna Vineyards continued the family tradition until 2014. See, <http://www.muir-hanna.com/HTML/Welcome.html>.

⁷¹ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 290-304.

⁷² Ruth E. Sutter, “John Muir and the Swett Family,” in *John Muir: Family, Friends, and Adventures*, ed. Sally M. Miller and Daryl Morrison (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 15-16.

⁷³ Sutter, “John Muir and the Swett Family,” 24.

⁷⁴ Sutter, “John Muir and the Swett Family,” 18.

California on its charter day, May 14, 1913.⁷⁵ Muir later argued with Swett over issues of educational theory.⁷⁶

During Muir's lifetime spent in California, which he considered his home until his death in 1914, he was introduced to the likes of painter William Keith, author Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Theodore Roosevelt. Despite Muir's "sanctimonious sermons against materialism and urbanization," most of his social circle consisted of professors, educators, intellectuals, industrialists, and high culture producers.⁷⁷ He leveraged his clout to mobilize one of the most influential preservation groups: in 1892, Muir led the charge to establish the Sierra Club, becoming its first president.⁷⁸ Modeled on the many civic organizations that focused on (according to Evan Berry they were "devoted to") nature, the Sierra Club also mirrored Scotland's civic naturalist organizations, upholding Victorian and civic ideologies.⁷⁹ Muir and the Sierra Club both made heavy use of religious discourse intertwined with civic responsibility. William Frederic Badé, Muir's first biographer, professor of Near Eastern religion, and fourth president of the Sierra Club, partnered with churches just like the mountaineering clubs of the time did.⁸⁰ Like Muir, the Sierra Club has oscillated between sharp and loose religious language.⁸¹ For instance, the Club's activism in September 2018, against the Line-3 crude oil pipeline contracted by Enbridge in Bemidji, Minnesota, employed the rhetoric of "defending the

⁷⁵ Nicholas C. Polos, "The Neo-Californians: John Muir and John Swett and the Inner world," in *John Muir in Historical Perspective*, ed. Sally M. Miller (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 63.

⁷⁶ Polos, "The Neo-Californians," 67.

⁷⁷ Ronald Limbaugh, "California's Kindred Spirits: John Muir and William Keith," in *John Muir: Family, Friends, and Adventures*, ed. Sally M. Miller and Daryl Morrison (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 67.

⁷⁸ Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 81.

⁷⁹ Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 63; Finnegan, *Natural History Societies and Civic Culture in Victorian Scotland*, 88.

⁸⁰ Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 89; William Frederic Badé, *John Muir: His Life, Letter, and Other Writings* (Seattle: Mountaineers, 1996).

⁸¹ Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 88-89.

sacred.”⁸² For Muir, unlike Swett, education was most fulfilled, most pure, in the wilderness, as was divine revelation.⁸³

Both Muir and the Sierra Club were integral in representing the movement to establish the National Parks and the National Park System. The moniker “Father of the National Parks” is part of the Muir-myth. Many, many individuals labored hard for the Parks’ inception, but if any one person was as connected and privileged and talented as to unify the voice of the Park movement, it was surely John Muir. Supporters of preservation framed the Parks as “useless” for anything other than deep, human needs: spiritual, psychological, and recreational. Muir recognized the effectiveness of this rhetorical and philosophical tactic: “Nothing dollarable is safe, however guarded.”⁸⁴ The fight for Muir’s wilderness culminated in the fight for the Hetch-Hetchy Valley, once part of the Yosemite area. Hetch-Hetchy was captured by the needs of San Francisco after the earthquake and fire of 1906. The earthquake not only destroyed many of William Keith’s works, but also Muir’s health as it gave his opponents the ammunition to destroy his argument for preserving Hetch-Hetchy.⁸⁵ Muir lost the battle for Hetch-Hetchy in 1913 with the signing of the Raker Act, which effectively gave Hetch-Hetchy to San Francisco to be utilized as a water and power source for the city by damming the river that ran through it. A year later, Muir lost his battle with pneumonia, resulting in his death on December 24, 1914. He was seventy-six years old.

⁸² Nellis Kennedy-Howard, “Defending the Sacred From Line-3,” September 14, 2018.

<https://www.sierraclub.org/compass/2018/09/defending-sacred-line-3>. Winona LaDuke, Ojibwa activist and intellectual, played a prominent role in the initiative. This is also an example of indigenous religious rhetoric employed to stave off colonialist resource extraction that threatens life and sovereignty, as well as those things considered “sacred.”

⁸³ Polos, “The Neo-Californians,” 72-73.

⁸⁴ Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2010), 43.

⁸⁵ Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch-Hetchy: America’s Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford, 2005), Kindle edition, Location 354.

Prior to Muir's death, he guided President Roosevelt through Yosemite in 1903, traveled around the world first in 1904, then botanized and explored South America and Africa from 1911 to 1912, and earned three more honorary degrees from Harvard, Yale, and the University of Wisconsin.⁸⁶ Muir took part in expeditions through Alaska, charting territories, searching for lost ships, and getting to know the Tlingit people through guided trips and personal relationships.⁸⁷ Muir's popularity changed the landscape of land philosophy and preservation cultures and affected American folklore and religious discourse.⁸⁸

Literature Review

This thesis argues that John Muir was a religious intellectual for nineteenth-century genteel America, and that Muir's social position shaped his worldview and approach to environmental rhetoric. The literature that informs this thesis covers a broad range of topics. While the thesis's central theme is John Muir and religion, I include methods and theories from religious studies as well as American environmental and social history, literary studies, communication studies, anthropology, and political and social theory. The main theorist who informs my approach is Antonio Gramsci. First, I will review some of the central texts written by John Muir, then the main theoretical literature for my analysis of religion, followed by the primary biographical literature on John Muir. I will then review the central literature that frames nineteenth-century genteel culture.

⁸⁶ Michael P. Branch, *John Muir's Last Journey: South to the Amazon and East to Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2001).

⁸⁷ Kim Heacox, *John Muir and the Ice that Started a Fire: How a Visionary and the Glaciers of Alaska Changed America* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2014); Daniel Lee Henry, *Across the Shaman's River: John Muir, The Tlingit Stronghold, and the Opening of the North* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2017).

⁸⁸ Kerry Mitchell, *Spirituality and the State: Managing Nature and Experience in America's National Parks* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 91, 104.

John Muir wrote extensively. Muir's letters were compiled in the book *John Muir: His Life, Letters and Other Writings*, edited by William Badè.⁸⁹ The John Muir Papers curated by the Holt-Atherton Special Collections at the University of the Pacific comprises the second cache of Muir's correspondence.⁹⁰ These resources detail Muir's relationships and intimate sentiments regarding issues related to politics, religion, and the environment. John Muir's first publication, *Picturesque California: The Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Slope* (New York: J. Dewey Publishing Co., 1888) started Muir's career as a visionary for the American imagination of the American wilderness. Muir's memories from his birth and early childhood in Scotland to his boyhood in Wisconsin were collected in *The Story of my Boyhood and Youth* (Boston: Houghton Milton Company, 1913). *The Yosemite* was one of Muir's early works, describing in great and poetic detail the Yosemite Valley for potential tourists.⁹¹ However, Muir's most famous writing, *Our National Parks*, holds many of the most nationalistic and religious sentiments in Muir's corpus of work.⁹² Muir's time in Alaska also figures prominently in this thesis. Muir published his experiences in *Travels in Alaska* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915) and *The Cruise of the Corwin: Journal of the Artic Expedition of 1881 in Search of DeLong and the Jeanette* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917).

The critical terms offered by Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) offer the most central analytical terms for this thesis. Gramsci's *Prison Letters* lends the concepts of hegemony, common sense, the intellectual, culture, and worldview to this study. Bruce Grelle's work *Antonio Gramsci and the Question of Religion: Ideology, Ethics, and Hegemony* synthesizes the

⁸⁹ William Frederic Badè, *John Muir: His Life and Letters and Other Writings*, ed Terry Gifford, (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1996).

⁹⁰ <https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/muir/>.

⁹¹ John Muir, *The Yosemite* (New York: The Century, 1912).

⁹² Muir, *Our National Park*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1901).

relevant work on Gramsci's history and thought development in a fashion that distills his concepts so that they may be deployed for the analysis of religion.⁹³ Peter Ives's study of Gramsci's work in linguistics frames the relationship to the material conditions of both language use and development.⁹⁴ Anthropologist Kate Crehan has framed Gramsci's analysis of social cultural processes, studying Gramsci's development of his materialist conception of culture.⁹⁵

The literature on genteel culture, which strongly shaped Muir's life and thought, starts with Harvard rhetorical philosophy professor George Santayana's 1911 address, "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy."⁹⁶ Santayana framed the genteel tradition as the "high culture" constitution of moral and intellectual development for early American culture, with Harvard University as the center of its development. Rhetorical scholar Dorothy C. Broaddus's book *Genteel Rhetoric* (1999) analyzes the rhetorical style of genteel intellectuals along with detailing the history of transatlantic developments in philosophy and politics in the nineteenth century.⁹⁷ Heavily influenced by Scottish Common Sense philosophy, Moderate Calvinist intellectual and theological traditions, and Scottish Enlightenment ideas, a "high culture" intellectual tradition was formulating and constructing an "American tradition" in the nineteenth century that emphasized a collaboration of "self-culture" with civic ethics.⁹⁸ The intellectual and rhetorical tradition was further studied by Nathan Crick in *The Keys of Power* (2017).⁹⁹ Crick

⁹³ Bruce Grelle, *Antonio Gramsci and the Question of Religion: Ideology, Ethics, and Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁹⁴ Peter Ives, *Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bhaktin Circle & the Frankfurt School* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

⁹⁵ Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology* (London: Pluto, 2002).

⁹⁶ George Santayana, *The Genteel Tradition: Nine Essays by George Santayana* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

⁹⁷ Dorothy C. Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric: Writing High Culture in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 11.

⁹⁸ Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 21.

⁹⁹ Nathan Crick, *The Keys of Power: The Rhetoric and Politics of Transcendentalism* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2017).

offers a more detailed focus on the relationship of the Transcendentalist movement to genteel culture.

Historian of science and religion Peter Harrison has shown that religion does not constitute things akin to “natural kinds,” that is, groupings unrelated to human activity.¹⁰⁰ And yet, both religion and science have long histories of organizing social behaviors. Kocku von Stuckrad resolves the debates over the territory of religion by turning to discursive approaches for the study of religion, which can be applied to the study of John Muir and religious identity and rhetoric in nineteenth-century North America.¹⁰¹ For the purpose of this thesis, following von Stuckrad I define religion as “an empty signifier that can be activated with definitions, meanings, and communication practices”; it is “the societal organization of knowledge” using religion as a frame of reference.¹⁰² ‘Religion’ is never discovered without interpretive filters or without strategic use, but rather it is created through frames of discourse for the purposes of its users. Religious discourse potentially entangles with other discourses, and as such, this approach requires the exploration of interactions among multiple meaning-making activities. This approach further employs ideology critique, which analyzes “how discourses relate to human interests—often focusing on how discourses mask or distort what they pretend to describe.”¹⁰³ The methodological assumption is that there is no internal dynamic that makes an object or activity *religious* or *a religion*. Anthropologist Malory Nye’s concept of *religion-making*, highlighting the active process by which certain practices, objects, and identities enter the field of religious discourse, figures prominently in this thesis by looking for the construction of

¹⁰⁰ Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 3.

¹⁰¹ Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800-2000* (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 13-14.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

religion—by Muir, by “nature religion” scholars, and by Muir biographers—instead of assuming its essence.¹⁰⁴

Scholars of Muir, such as Linnie Marsh Wolfe and Michael P. Cohen, have produced divergent images of Muir throughout their scholarship.¹⁰⁵ “Muir-myths” of various followers, admirers, and detractors have combined to drive a larger narrative for the legacy of a man who is considered the face of the National Park System. Muir remained tightly connected to a range of progressive Christianities that provided the dominant religious identities of many of Muir’s friends; therefore, it is understandable that his first primary scholarly biographer, William Fredric Badè (1871-1936), was a professor of religion. Badè portrayed Muir as devoutly Christian yet unorthodox, not beholden to biblical literalism. In contrast to later scholarship, Badè did not use the patriarch, John’s father Daniel Muir, as representative of “Calvinist Christianity” (as historian Mark Stoll has rightly critiqued of Stephen Fox).¹⁰⁶ Further, Badè did not overlook John Muir’s fuller sentiments towards his father. Muir, eulogizing his father, paid particular reverence to his father’s piety; he found peace in his father’s last days on earth: “His last years, as he lay broken in body, waiting for rest, were full of calm divine light.”¹⁰⁷ Badè, like Muir himself, did not have the habit of using “Calvinist” to describe harsh or orthodox Christianity. Badè’s choice of terminology was perhaps due to a more complex conception of

¹⁰⁴ Malory Nye, “Religion, Post-Religionism, and Religioning: Religious Studies and Contemporary Cultural Debates,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* vol. 12, no. 1/4 (2000): 447-476.

¹⁰⁵ Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003); Michael P. Cohen, *The Pathless Way: John Muir and The American Wilderness* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

¹⁰⁶ Mark Stoll, “God and John Muir: A Psychological Interpretation of John Muir’s Life and Religion,” (https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/life/god_john_muir_mark_stoll.aspx). Stoll does retain a common focus on the tensions between Daniel and John Muir, in an archetypal-like ‘father versus son’ battle. This is a tendency that unfortunately downplays other areas of religious influence on Muir’s life. Stoll does make very clear that Daniel was actually at odds with the Campbellite practice of having a broad definition of what constitutes a Christian.

¹⁰⁷ Badè, *The Life and Letters of John Muir*, 22.

Calvinism, with which both he and Muir were familiar (especially given Muir's upbringing in a Scottish ecclesiological culture shaped in diverse ways by the theology of John Calvin and his followers).¹⁰⁸

Muir's second prominent biographer, possibly more popular than Badè, was the historian and librarian Linnie Marsh Wolfe, who wrote her biography of Muir in 1945.¹⁰⁹ According to Wolfe, Daniel "remained a Calvinist in his conception of God."¹¹⁰ However, she does note that Daniel had severe disagreements with Calvin's theology of election.¹¹¹ Wolfe caricatures Calvinism as a strict and hostile religion and "evangelical," in which "salvation could only be obtained by a perpetual state of emotional excitement, called 'worshiping the Lord.'"¹¹² This vision of Christianity, though narrow and removed from Muir's diverse Christian context, in light of the popularity of Wolfe's work encouraged Muir scholarship to frame Muir's religion as something outside of Christianity.¹¹³

Muir's attitudes towards non-Western traditions and cultures seem to be overlooked by many of his biographers. Historian Michael P. Cohen's influential study, *The Pathless Way: John Muir and the American Wilderness* (1984), follows a Romantic myth-making approach to the study of John Muir.¹¹⁴ Cohen was interested in the "mythical Muir," and he sought to discover how the myth came about. Cohen stated that "we need the myth and also the text." Cohen specified that his book was shaped by his friends' questions: "Was Muir a Taoist, a Zen

¹⁰⁸ For a study of the role of Calvin's theology and following in Scotland, see Andrew T. N. Muirhead, *Reformation, Dissent and Diversity: The Story of Scotland's Churches, 1560-1960* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹⁰⁹ Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

¹¹⁰ Wolfe, *Son of Wilderness*, 5.

¹¹¹ Wolfe, *Son of Wilderness*, 21.

¹¹² Wolfe, *Son of Wilderness*, 9.

¹¹³ I am allowing for "Christian to denote those who identify with the broad movements of Christianity. Acts of identifying, or identification, take precedence over a scholars personal criteria for what counts as authentically Christian.

¹¹⁴ Michael P. Cohen, *The Pathless Way: John Muir and The American Wilderness* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

Buddhist, a pantheist?” Like Fox, Cohen separates Muir from the discourses of his time to connect Muir with movements that Muir himself never identified with. Using his own religion-making rhetoric, Cohen articulated that a “trust in the goodness of machines goes still deeper and becomes a religion, a faith in Man.”¹¹⁵ Cohen’s approach favored casting the struggle between modern industrial cultures and environmental projects as a religious struggle, separate from other aspects of society. It contributed to the mystification of material politics and social struggles of American expansionism by presenting Muir’s own religious rhetoric, such as referring to mountains as temples, as descriptive of American realities. Cohen argued that one must “discriminate between activities that lead to enlightenment and those that do not”; he was fixated on “the style, or manner of mountaineering activities.”¹¹⁶ Cohen contrasted mountaineering with Victorian culture as evidenced by his statement, “Muir’s belief in the value of mountaineering as a human activity—and my own as well—must be set against the justifications given by Victorians as the inception of the modern sport.”¹¹⁷ It is in “the spirit” in which Muir wrote that Cohen saw his greatest contribution to mountaineering literature.¹¹⁸ This opposition of mountaineering to Victorian culture overlooks Victorian culture’s important contributions to mountaineering, such as technical developments and cultural support. This is a major oversight. Cohen relied on caricatures of religion and science in late-Victorian transatlanticism, casting Muir against both orthodox religion and science.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Cohen, *The Pathless Way*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Cohen, *The Pathless Way*, 85.

¹¹⁷ Cohen’s assessment of Victorian activity, mountaineering, and culture is wanting. His argument that for Victorians “all human activity fit into neat categories” is both insufficient and bereft of rhetorical analysis. For a response to assessments of Victorian mountaineering similar to Cohen’s, see Ann C. Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2016).

¹¹⁸ Cohen, *The Pathless Way*, 85.

¹¹⁹ See David Clifford, Elizabeth Wadge, Alex Warwick, and Martin Willis, *Repositioning Victorian Sciences: Shifting Centres in Nineteenth-Century Scientific Thinking* (London: Anthem Press, 2006); Daniel Brown, *The Poetry of Victorian Science: Style, Science and Nonsense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Jason A.

In the 1990s, historian Ronald Limbaugh criticized previous scholars' lack of attention to the Campbellite theology and ecclesiological culture that constituted much of Muir's family life.

¹²⁰ His stark critique of the previous twenty years of scholarship paved the way for one of the most detailed accounts concerning the diversity of Christian discourse in which Muir was entangled. Limbaugh's most discerning critique of Muir's interpreters is this: "The failure to differentiate between Christian apostasy and anti-denominationalism has been the bane of most of Muir's recent biographers."¹²¹ Limbaugh represents Muir as a "Christian humanist" and he resituates Christianity as active in the critique of industrial capitalism in late Victorian America.¹²²

Meanwhile, environmental historian Dennis Williams expounded on reappraisals of Muir and Christianity by rethinking and extending the discourse of Scottish Campbellite and late-Victorian American Christianity.¹²³ Following Ronald Limbaugh and Richard Cartwright, Williams continued their analytical discourse, focusing on "Christian theology and literature" as

Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

¹²⁰ Dennis Williams, "John Muir, Christian Mysticism and the Spiritual Value of Nature," in *John Muir: Life and Work*, ed. Sally M. Miller (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 82-99; Ronald Limbaugh, "The Nature of Muir's Religion," *Pacific Historian* 29 (Summer/Fall) XXIX, 16-30; Limbaugh, "Pride, Prejudice, and Patrimony: The Dispute Between George Wharton James and the Family and Friends of John Muir," in *John Muir: Family, Friends, and Adventures*, ed. Sally M. Miller and Daryl Morison (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 83-103.

¹²¹ Limbaugh, "The Nature of Muir's Religion," 19. There may be issues with "apostasy," but this generally accords with a discursive view of religion that helps to contextualize Muir historically.

¹²² Limbaugh, "The Nature of Muir's Religion," 27. Limbaugh justifies his position thusly: "In criticizing the moral bankruptcy of modern, industrial Christianity, Muir joined the call for Christian reform and echoed the words of fellow-creationist Alfred Wallace: Let us hope that the twentieth century will see the rise of a truer religion, a purer Christianity . . . in which morality prevails over money-making, exploitation gives way to equity, and life's values are measured by quality instead of quantity. Closer to nineteenth-century social gospel advocate Walter Rauschenbush in both time and spirit than to eighteenth-century Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards, Muir was a Christian activist whose preoccupation with nature's religious symbols did not overshadow his focus on Christian moral purpose. Unlike some modern cult-followers who have turned away from life's cares and responsibilities in a mystical search for perfection, John Muir, to use John Passmore's phrase, 'never ceased to be human.'" Why is this long quote here?

¹²³ Dennis Williams, "John Muir, Christian Mysticism and the Spiritual Value of Nature," in *John Muir: Life and Work*, ed. Sally M. Miller (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 82-99; Dennis Williams, *God's Wilds: John Muir's Vision of Nature* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002).

sources of influence on Muir's intellectual articulations.¹²⁴ Though he critiqued Steven Fox, Bill Devall, and Michael Cohen for framing Muir as an "Eastern mystic," Williams later referred to Muir's "Christian mysticism" influence as if that might be more informative.¹²⁵ This, however, runs into the problem of what constitutes "mystical" Christianity over a more mundane Christianity. Muir's knowledge of "mysticism," Williams stated, would have been limited to Emerson and Thoreau.¹²⁶ However, this appears improbable given Muir's familiarity with the literature and history of early Christianity.¹²⁷

Literary scholar Jeffrey Bilbro has synthesized recent scholarship, reacting to the divorcing of John Muir from his Christian upbringing by scholars such as Fox, Cohen, and Taylor. In two of Bilbro's literary works, the range of theological statements from Campbellite theologians demonstrates that Muir was not as unattached from Christian theological discourse as Fox and Cohen would have us think. Without having to commit to an essentialist statement that Muir "was a Christian," Bilbro's work allows the reader to conceptualize a broader discourse and range of Christian identity in late-Victorian America as well as the genealogy of Muir's thoughts on religion, nature, and science. In a somewhat implicit but important critique of the "pantheist" approach to "Muir's religion," Bilbro noted that for Muir, God cannot be found *everywhere*, but rather in privileged spaces: so-called wilderness.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Dennis Williams, "Range of Light: John Muir, Christianity, and Nature in a Post-Darwinian World," Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1992, 3. Williams states correctly, "These interpretations of Muir stretch the evidence beyond viability" (2).

¹²⁵ Dennis Williams, "John Muir, Christian Mysticism and the Spiritual Value of Nature," in *John Muir: Life and Work*, ed. Sally M. Miller (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 95.

¹²⁶ Williams, *Range of Light*, 2.

¹²⁷ John Muir, *The Writings of John Muir: The Story of My Boyhood, A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916), 193.

¹²⁸ Jeffrey Bilbro, "Preserving 'God's Wildness' for Redemptive Baptism: John Muir and Disciples of Christ Theology." *Christianity and Literature* 61, no 4 (2012): 85.

The implications for Muir's genteel social connections have not been adequately explored. Recognizing Muir's connection to genteel culture is not necessarily new. Historian and Oklahoma City University librarian Robert L. Dorman framed Muir's anti-commercialist and anti-anthropocentric critique as modernism replacing late-Victorian genteel culture. Furthermore, Dorman situated Muir within the modernist movement that critiqued genteel "ornateness."¹²⁹ Dorman further contended that Muir was frustrated primarily with the corruption of politicians.¹³⁰ However, despite not framing genteel culture, Dorman overlooked Muir's genteel cultural background, literature, and social circles. Moreover, Dorman assumed Muir's rhetoric describing wilderness with genteel, Romantic cultural preferences and language gained little traction because there was not a real modernism to counter it.¹³¹ Ultimately, Dorman alternates between Muir the modernist critic and Muir the genteel critic.

Recent scholarship on religion and environmentalism pushes a conception of Muir that favors complexity and ambiguity over denominational or religious certainty. Evan Berry's *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (2015) contrasts with the formidable work of Linnie Marsh Wolfe (who argued that Muir's Scottish Protestant upbringing was central to his thought) in which she stated that Muir contributed to the "cutting away" of old theologies.¹³² Instead, Berry argues that Muir was not attempting to "overturn centrality of Protestantism in the American religious imagination."¹³³ Muir was not the "first of many twentieth-century thinkers who worked to harmonize theological ethics with a post-Darwinian

¹²⁹ Robert L. Dorman, *A Word for Nature: Pioneering Environmental Advocates, 1845-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 148.

¹³⁰ Dorman, *A Word for Nature*, 155-165.

¹³¹ Dorman, *A Word for Nature*, 141.

¹³² Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 79.

¹³³ Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 80.

view of the position of human-beings in the natural order,” as Berry claims.¹³⁴ Berry astutely critiqued Muir’s interpreters as his “disciples” who wishfully thought Muir to be outside of Christianity as they likewise situated themselves.¹³⁵ Buttressed by the Bible and Milton, Berry’s depiction of Muir “translated . . . Christian resurrection into an ecological plane.”¹³⁶ Mark Stoll and Evan Berry agree that Muir’s religion “paralleled the evolution of liberal Christianity.”¹³⁷

Overview of Chapters

This thesis will lay the foundation for rethinking how we understand John Muir critically in the context of nineteenth-century discourse on religion, genteel culture, nationalism, race, and nature. The first chapter of this thesis, “Scientists Don’t Know What to do With Trees (or Religion), But Poets and Politicians Do: Antonio Gramsci and the Critical-Contextual Study of the History of John Muir, Nature, and Religion,” explores religious discourse in Muir’s life, legacy, and literature, situating Muir within the politics of American religious discourse. Muir, like many Anglo-Euro-Americans, used broadly Christian conceptions of religion, nature, and humanity to structure logics of persuasion and identity.¹³⁸ In contrast to Muir’s Romantic, Victorian conceptualization of religion, as well as the Muir scholarship that was heavily shaped by that tradition, I develop a more critical approach to the history of Muir and religion. By turning to the work of Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci, I employ tools that focus on the

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 81.

¹³⁶ Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 82.

¹³⁷ Mark Stoll, *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 144.

¹³⁸ By “the politics of American religious discourse,” I mean to say the power of a number of given claims to truth and identity using the discourses of theological and world religion that dominated the time. I have in mind specifically the dynamics of “religious freedom” and identity. Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Finbarr Curtis, *The Production of Religious Freedom* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

role of everyday, micropolitical power in the context of supporting colonial projects. By challenging previous scholarship on Muir and religion, this chapter demonstrates that critical reflection on the relevant terms (e.g., religion, nature, wilderness) reveals Muir's religious discourse as much more class-based and political than previously thought. After situating the historical and social conditions of Muir's religious discourse in conversation with Gramsci's analytical terminology in chapter one, the second chapter, "Whose Nature? Whose Religion: An Analysis of John Muir as a Gramscian Intellectual of the American Genteel Class," frames Muir's genteel social context to demonstrate why and how he became an influential spokesperson for nineteenth-century American nation-building. I use the Gramscian social theory of intellectuals as products of their social conditions. The fact that white males with substantial capital had more and easier access to the means and rights to social power on a national scale. Muir's cultural (literary, linguistic/rhetorical, discursive) and social (white, Protestant, genteel) positionality served to situate his ability to persuade elite and popular audiences with the cultural capital of literary acumen and rhetorical prowess. By reconsidering nature, wilderness, and the human place in relation to those terms as socially constructed, this chapter portends problems with the "man of his times" approach to Muir historiography, such as the lack of attention to the political nature of religious discourse and its lasting effects. The second chapter will demonstrate that Muir's class positionality colored his concerns and effectivity. The third chapter, "What's So Natural about National Parks? John Muir, Myth-Making and the Settler Colonial Common Sense of America's Wilderness Prophet," will explore Muir as a Gramscian intellectual of the colonial politics of myth-making discourse, which ennobled projects of colonial development and sovereignty of United States colonial activity and dispossession of indigenous lands for settler recreation and resource extraction purposes. Muir

relied not only on the structures of empire (railroads, military, and expeditions) but also on the myths of Anglo-Euro-American theological and philosophical language. In this third chapter, the colonial politics of Muir's myth-making will be clarified in relation to the entanglements of religious, racial, and colonial developments in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century environmentalism. The conclusion to this thesis, "American Religion-Making and the Making of a Natural Nation: A Consideration from the Life of John Muir," offers considerations for further analysis of John Muir and American religion in environmental and social politics in light of the movement of American empire through socio-cultural spaces.

CHAPTER 1: ON TREES AND RELIGION: ANTONIO GRAMSCI AND THE CRITICAL-CONTEXTUAL STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF JOHN MUIR, NATURE, AND RELIGION

In 2005 geneticist Andrew Grover of the U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station wrote an article, “What Genes Make a Tree a Tree?” in the journal *Trends in Plant Science*.¹³⁹ Grover’s article outlined problems with genetic qualifications for trees. “Tree” is a useful, though heuristic device to categorize certain plants. The genes that produce “woody growth” are often found as retreating and returning in the evolutionary life of many plants, and “forest trees constitute a contrived group of plants that have more in common with herbaceous relatives than we foresters like to admit.”¹⁴⁰ What makes a tree a tree and not an herbaceous plant? Herbaceous plants, such as woody members of the genus *Sonchus* and *Echium* “native to the Macaronesian islands, have evolved from herbaceous continental progenitors.”¹⁴¹ Genetically, the criteria are more complicated than previously thought. As difficult and political as it is to classify trees, given biological and resource considerations, one may imagine how it is with religion.

Trees have helped to create and expand the United States. Trees constitute every imaginable form of capital in the Bourdieusian sense: economic, cultural, and social capital.¹⁴² The cultural presence of trees has been felt from the earliest colonial literature that promoted the presence of trees for financial gain, to the Scottish poet James Hedderwick’s proclamation in 1862 that “it is only a country like America which can produce these mammoth enormities in

¹³⁹ Andrew T. Groover, “What Genes Make a Tree a Tree?” *Trends in Plant Science*, no. 5 (May 2005): 210-214.

¹⁴⁰ Groover, “What Genes Make a Tree a Tree?,” 210.

¹⁴¹ Groover, “What Genes Make a Tree a Tree?,” 211.

¹⁴² Pierre Bourdieu, “Forms of Capital,” *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Thomas Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58.

whole forestfuls.”¹⁴³ This sentiment carried over into the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and the naturalist he admired, John Muir.¹⁴⁴ Standing in tension were, on the one side, the ideologies of industrial capitalists desiring the wood for economic capital and, on the other side, poetic authors desiring the same trees for social and cultural capital and mythological symbols. As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu might have it, trees function as religious capital, or social and cultural resources, within the field of religious discourse.¹⁴⁵ The sovereignty over trees and the credibility to define them as sacred constitute the trees as religious resources. An example of this is the way in which John Muir was able to gain renown through his mixture of poetic theological articulations and scientific observations of the Giant Sequoias of Yosemite, demonstrating the collective cultural capital of the well-rounded education which produced Muir (and his image) as a genteel intellectual. In 1903, after noting that Emerson called Muir “more wonderful than Thoreau,” journalist Ray Standard Baker had this to say about Muir:

We are interested, not so much in what John Muir has done, though he has done much, as in what he is — the man of rare personal charm, of ripe philosophy, of gentle humor, of deep, even mystical, appreciation of natural beauty, the friend of the wild things of the woods, the poet of trees and waterfalls. John Muir’s life appeals to us because it is a complete expression of a deep human instinct which we have often felt, and throttled — the instinct which urges us to throw off our besieging restraints and complexities, to climb the hills and lie down under the trees, to be simple and natural. John Muir not only felt that impulse, but he really escaped. . . . A rare man, poet and scientist, we have to be thankful that John Muir stands out, though almost alone in a world of money makers, a quiet exemplar of the simpler life.¹⁴⁶

Baker’s article shows us that Muir’s allure came largely from a mixture of his eloquence and his action. He went. He did. And, he wrote. Muir’s penchant for “deep human instinct” resonated

¹⁴³ Eric Rutkow, *American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Scribner, 2012), 18, 72, 75. Kindle Edition.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Terry Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy* (Durham, UK: Equinox, 2007), 154-155.

¹⁴⁶ Ray Stannard Baker, “John Muir,” *The Outlook*, May 2, 1903, 377.

with genteel self-culturists and Victorian-era theological anthropology in the vein of Emerson's invective to initiate social change within the loci of the self.

Much has been written about John Muir's religion. However, much has been written as if *religion* has an essence or substance that can be isolated from other parts of society such as ethnic, economic, or racial politics. How scholars have understood religion has shaped how they have articulated Muir's religion. Was Muir a Christian? Or did Muir follow a distinct *nature religion*? Was Muir Daoist, or Buddhist, or agnostic? Certainly, individuals and groups have found in Muir the rhetorical inspiration for shaping their own identities and practices of religious and environmental speech. But how might we speak anew about *Muir's religion*; or rather, is it better to speak about Muir *and* religion? Employing the critical insights of Antonio Gramsci (and those who refined Gramsci's thought, i.e., a Gramscian perspective), this chapter asserts and employs a new way to analyze religion in the life, legacy, and writings of John Muir, as notions of hegemony and common sense have not been previously employed in a sustained fashion. Furthermore, this chapter provides new thrusts in the study of John Muir and myth-making, religion-making, and political discourse. When I employ the terms 'myth-making' and 'religion-making,' I mean to point to the fact that this critical analysis is based on a theoretical and methodological foundation recognizing that humans create systems of practice and meaning from the conditions of their environments; nothing in either myth nor religion is monolithic, uncontested, or demonstrably eternal. In doing so, this chapter offers a critical frame and reassessment at the intersection of John Muir studies and American religion studies that considers the political ramifications of myth-making. This critical-contextual analysis provides a more robust picture of the social dynamics of mythical and religious discourse in the settler colonial context of nineteenth-century environmentalism.

From Trees to Religion: Contending with Contentious Classifications

If religion may be defined in infinite ways, as historian of religion J. Z. Smith argues, then what do we look for, and how do we analyze it?¹⁴⁷ Or, to use the words of historian Peter Harrison, where is the *territory of religion*?¹⁴⁸ If the desire of the researcher is to critique and analyze historical data and not to advocate for a normative view of religion, how are we to proceed? One way out of mapping religion as if it pre-existed our analyses is to analyze how people come to speak of religion and how they negotiate legitimating their claims. Religious studies scholar Craig Martin's connection of ideology critique to discourse analysis helps reframe this approach: "I am persuaded that discourse analysis is better suited to noting the extent to which discourses are blue-prints for, rather than maps of, reality."¹⁴⁹ Ideology critique explores "how discourses relate to human interests—often focusing on how discourses mask or distort what they pretend to describe."¹⁵⁰ The methodological assumption is that there is no internal dynamic that makes an object or activity *religious* or *a religion*. The categories of religion are connected through discursive webs, which are negotiated by human interests and power relations. The focus on the role of power and fluidity in social and cultural analysis owes a great deal to Antonio Gramsci.¹⁵¹ As such, focus on the *making* of things such as *nature*, *religion*, and *nation* will ground this analysis. Moreover, *myth-making* will be used as an analytical tool to denote the construction of narratives by human interests, which operate by the collection of authority, prestige, and fascination.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Johnathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 193.

¹⁴⁸ Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹⁴⁹ Craig Martin, *Masking Hegemony: The Genealogy of Liberalism, Religion, and the Private Sphere* (London: Equinox, 2010), 9.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Steven Jones, *Antonio Gramsci* (London: Routledge, 2010), see Chapter 2, "Culture," 27-40.

¹⁵² Or, in Gramscian terms, *prestigio-fascino*.

The entanglement of race, power, and religion has been mystified by religious discourses of nature and discourses of nature religion, such as the myths of untouched wilderness and “primitive” medicine.¹⁵³ I am defining “religious discourses” as those discourses that make authoritative claims to conceptualizing or defining “religion” or claims that use religion and historically related categories and discourses for the sake of rhetoric and authority.

The concepts of *nature* and *religion* are not universal; their development in Euro-American discourse largely shaped settler colonial conceptions of the world or, as Mark Rifkin puts it, their “settler common sense,” for those expanding empires across the globe. Colonial scientific knowledge and power structures combined to create fields of discourse whereby social actors could act strategically, finding and making meaning. The proper performance of knowledge created social capital for those who produced it. The popular 2009 documentary by Ken Burns (*The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*) proclaiming the National Parks as bastions of democratic space.¹⁵⁴ However, director of legislative and government affairs for the National Parks Conservation Association Kristen Brengel argued recently that Muir’s National Parks and national wilderness recreation areas were not (and, to a degree, are not yet) spaces for everyone; many Americans (especially Native Americans and people of color) have not experienced these spaces *as* sites of religious or spiritual use.¹⁵⁵ While industrialists saw

¹⁵³ As M. Kat Anderson has argued in *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California’s Natural Resources* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Wendy Makoons Genuisz, *Our Knowledge is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009). The nineteenth-century discourses of “advanced” or “evolved” religion (Christianity) paralleled the discourses of “advanced” medicine and technology, which allowed for the suppression of indigenous traditions. This is not absent in Muir’s writings, which will be explored later in this thesis.

¹⁵⁴ “Introduction: The Radical Idea of the Nations Parks,” *Episode One: 1851-1890, The Scripture of Nature*. <http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/history/ep1/>; Margaret Grebowicz, *The National Parks to Come* (Stanford: Stanford, 2015), 5; Kristen Brengel, “The Essential Democracy of National Parks: Politics and the NPS,” *Ranger: The Journal for the Association of National Park Rangers* 28, no. 3 (summer 2012): 2-3.

¹⁵⁵ See Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford, 1999).

wilderness as resources to be extracted and not of religious space, Americans outside of privileged classes have been hindered by social structures or financial limitations from reaching these spaces, or they were exposed to different wilderness ideologies, such as understanding wilderness as a space of agrarian limitation, racial violence, or class privilege. Moreover, meaning-making activities and myths held by previous occupants of wilderness spaces (especially National Parks), that is, indigenous peoples, suffered the active efforts of strategic erasure by settler modes of sovereignty and representation (such as the Ahwahneechees of the Yosemite Valley and their “goddess-of-the-valley” Tis-se-yak, who became erased with “El Capitan”).¹⁵⁶ The idea of wilderness as sacred space has been a powerful concept in American cultural productions of literature, media, and national narratives, both folk and official.¹⁵⁷ Dynamics of race, nation, and class shaped nineteenth-century environmental culture, despite common environmentalist rhetoric of universal benefit. Religious discourse shaped many of the matrices of colonial worldviews.¹⁵⁸ Manifest destiny is an example par excellence. As America expanded its presence from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific during the nineteenth century, conceptions of the world and coinciding discourses of behavior normalization followed. This ranged from the parochial education system that pressed indigenous children to abandon their traditions, to popular American narratives (or myths) that beatified American space as American beauty.¹⁵⁹ How a nation comes to authorize these myths is of great scholarly interest to those looking to understand the role of religious discourse in colonial power relations. Moreover,

¹⁵⁶ Steven Powers, *Tribes of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 367.

¹⁵⁷ Roderick Frazer Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 5th ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

¹⁵⁸ Bruce Grelle, *Antonio Gramsci and the Question of Religion: Ideology, Ethics, and Hegemony* (London: Routledge, 2017), 10. Gramsci, following philosopher Benedetto Croce, understood religion as “a conception of the world which has become a norm of life.” Gramsci’s “worldview” is often interchangeable with “conception of the world.”

¹⁵⁹ Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West* (New York: Oxford, 2018), 100.

dedication to addressing the historical and contemporary issues of colonialism must address the struggle over symbolic power and indigenous sovereignty and representation.

So where might one turn to analyze the role of power, authority, and discourse as they relate to religion, nature, and America? Where might we find a starting point for rethinking the “Muir-myth” as it relates to the myth-making activities of American expansion?¹⁶⁰ The “Gramscian tradition” effectively provides a framework for analyzing John Muir’s contributions to the development of American ideas of nation, nature, and religion as they relate to colonial conceptions of the world. Indeed, as semiotician Paul J. Thibault states, “The critical importance of Gramsci’s writings on language, the political, and the cultural for a social semiotic account of power and ideology remains seminal.”¹⁶¹ I will apply Gramsci’s conception of language and power to the politics of American and Muirian mythology.

Critical-Contextual Analysis, Antonio Gramsci, and the Religioning of John Muir

Gramsci’s theories of language, power, and culture will ground a *critical-contextual analysis* of the life, writings, and legacy of John Muir.¹⁶² That is to say, I understand language as a product of historical relations, understood best as a negotiation of power and under constant change. Language organizes experiences, as opposed to representing something “real.”¹⁶³ Against theories of language that seek to mine the gold nugget essences of supposedly universal concepts, Gramsci situated language locally as that which makes “knowledge about ourselves

¹⁶⁰ This is a term borrowed from Steven J. Holmes, *The Young John Muir: An Environmental Biography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 9.

¹⁶¹ Paul J. Thibault, *Social Semiotics as Praxis: Text, Social Meaning Making, and Nabokov’s Ada* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 24.

¹⁶² Peter Ives, *Gramsci’s Politics of Language: Engaging the Bhaktin Circle & the Frankfurt School* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

¹⁶³ Ives, *Gramsci’s Politics of Language*, 45.

and history possible.”¹⁶⁴ Discursive theories find their bearings in much of Gramsci’s thought.¹⁶⁵ His discourse analysis provides the tools for critiquing and analyzing the politics of environmentalism across ethnic and political territory.

Gramsci also reconstructed and provoked thought regarding concepts helpful for the study of religion, such as culture, hegemony, common sense, and the intellectual.¹⁶⁶ At this point, these terms will be framed before they are put into conversation with religion. In doing so, this thesis constructs a *critical-contextual* analysis for the study of John Muir and religion in American myth-making activity.

Gramsci’s insistence that culture is material, protean, and the product of historical development grounds this study. For Gramsci, reconsidering Marx’s economic (base) determinism for the consideration of legal, artistic, educational, and other forms of production (superstructure, which Gramsci bundled with ideology) requires one to observe how society is constructed through a complex and dialectical relationship of economic and non-economic production.¹⁶⁷ “Culture” generally refers to the way in which society cultivates itself, including structuring factors that shape economic ones. For Gramsci, culture is not some metaphysical agency, *a Geist*, if you will, but rather a material and historical form of power relationality; for Gramsci, culture was the process of living out power relations.¹⁶⁸ Following Gramsci, culture may be considered as the performance of *hegemony*.

¹⁶⁴ Kocku von Stuckrad, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800-2000* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 9.

¹⁶⁵ See David Howarth, Aletta J. Norval, and Yannis Stavrakakis, *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies, and Social Change* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2000). See especially the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

¹⁶⁶ Other terms will be addressed within the thesis, but these are the most central analytical terms.

¹⁶⁷ Steven Jones, *Antonio Gramsci* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 29.

¹⁶⁸ Grelle, *Antonio Gramsci and the Question of Religion*, 12; Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology* (London: Pluto, 2002). It may be important here to note that Gramsci rejected notions of teleology in considerations of culture. There is no grand end to history that culture serves (Crehan, 79-80).

Most simply, hegemony is the term that Gramsci employed to analyze the role of consent in power relations. Gramsci never provided a “neat capsule definition” of hegemony.¹⁶⁹ As Perry Anderson argues, hegemony is the relationality of power, between domination and influence.¹⁷⁰ Descriptions of the world coincide with “values that preside over [conceptions] that become in large measure internalized by those under its sway.”¹⁷¹ Gramsci puts it like this: “Every social stratum has its own “Common Sense” and its own “Good Sense,” which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of man.”¹⁷² Hegemony and coercion operate, per Gramsci, on a continuum where hegemony operates more where force does not.¹⁷³ Prestige (*prestigio*) and fascination (*fascino*) are the means by which the ruling classes perform their position of privilege, and they are important for the current study.¹⁷⁴ The genteel class, in which Muir was firmly embedded, largely demonstrated (and held) its position of privilege through these factors. Hegemony, for Gramsci, is largely a matter of education: “Every relationship of ‘hegemony’ is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the international and world-wide field, between complexes of national and continental civilisations [*sic*].”¹⁷⁵ The primary purpose of attending to hegemony is for the recognition of the relationship of cultural production (language, art,

¹⁶⁹ Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology*, 101. Crehan (2016) well describes Gramsci’s culture thus: “Culture, for Gramsci, names shared ways of being and living that have come into existence as a result of the interaction of a myriad of historical forces, and that remain subject to history. Certain cultures may appear to persist unchanged for long periods of time, nonetheless they are always inherently in flux: coming into being, undergoing transformation, passing away. The nature of their persistence or transformation can only be discovered by careful empirical study. Similarly, the degree to which they constitute coherent wholes, the degree to which they hang together, cannot be assumed. This, too, is an empirical question.” (Crehan, 2016), 53.

¹⁷⁰ Perry Anderson, *The H-Word: The Peripeteia Hegemony* (London: Verso, 2017), 26.

¹⁷¹ Anderson, *The H-Word*, 23.

¹⁷² Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1992), Kindle edition, location 8351-8257.

¹⁷³ Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology*, 102.

¹⁷⁴ Thibault, *Social Semiotics as Praxis*, 23.

¹⁷⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, 11th Printing (New York: International Publishers, 2011), Location 8855, Kindle Edition.

literature) to structures of power relations. Muir's cultural capital (the holding and performance of cultural production, the *fascino-prestigio*) positioned him to purchase, in a sense, cultural license to speak authoritatively and affect audiences and policy.

Indigenous and literary studies scholar Mark Rifkin's concept of "settler common sense" is important for constructing a proper analytic notion of *common sense* in the colonial context of American expansion, and it builds on Gramsci's concept of common sense. As Crehan states, Gramsci's *common sense* refers to a society's "taken-for-granted" grouping of "knowledge" and "assumed certainties that structure the basic landscapes within which individuals are socialized and chart their individual life courses."¹⁷⁶ Gramsci's concept of *common sense* (*senso commune*) differs from his concept of *good sense* (*buon senso*, which is closer to the American usage of "common sense").¹⁷⁷ Gramsci's conceptualization of *common sense* is largely representative of uncritical dispositions, with *good sense* being a salvageable portion. Common sense interacts with the philosophies of a society's intellectuals. Gramsci makes fluid use of "philosophy" in his work, but distilled it means the production of logic; this can be by the masses and their intellectuals through experience (common sense and folklore) or through scientific observation (philosophy). These two are not wholly separate, as Gramsci argues. Philosophy, of the scientific type, may be thought of as a centripetal force of critical reflection, whereas *folklore* and *common sense* have centrifugal force towards constructive ideology; Gramsci situates philosophy, folklore, and common sense as material products of historical conditions alongside conformism

¹⁷⁶ Crehan, *Gramsci's Common Sense*, 43. Crehan makes a point to distinguish *common sense* from Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*. *Habitus* is understood as "transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures," (Bourdieu 1990, 53, quoted in Crehan, 46) whereas *common sense* "refers primarily to the content of popular knowledge" (Crehan, 46).

¹⁷⁷ Crehan, *Gramsci's Common Sense*, 43. Crehan calls "common sense" a "mistranslation" because of a lack of linguistic equivalence.

and ideology.¹⁷⁸ Philosophy, folklore, and common sense are ways of looking at productions of conceptualizations of the world. These conceptualizations of the world are constructed by intellectuals, and, although Gramsci contended that every person is potentially a philosopher, only some formally hold such a position in society. It is crucial here to turn to Gramsci's idea of *the intellectual*, which introduces an analytical approach for thinking through Muir's influence in American cultural and political history.

Gramsci wrote that there "is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*."¹⁷⁹ *The intellectual* is recognized as such by society, as Gramsci puts it, "in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities."¹⁸⁰ The intellectual is not self-made, but reliant on the structures of and relationships with society. Everyone is capable of philosophy, Gramsci argued, but only some are recognized for their intellectual labor by society, as opposed to direct material production, such as cars, food, or buildings; these intellectuals function to produce (or co-produce with society) a *Weltanschauung*, or "world-perception."¹⁸¹ In Gramsci's work, three forms of the intellectual appear: the *organic intellectual*, the *traditional intellectual*, and the *popular intellectual*. As Hoare and Sperber note in Gramsci's work, the organic intellectual during the nineteenth century was a form of "self-criticism of the dominant class," an emerging social class at that.¹⁸² Traditional intellectuals, however, relied on institutions for their renown and authority. Neither figure, organic or traditional, is "free" from the institutions or groups that produce them. They are both products and producers. Ultimately, Gramsci conceived of another way of

¹⁷⁸ Gramsci, *SPN*, 628-638. Gramsci argues for the "highest sense of a conception of the world that is implicitly manifest in art, in law, in economic activity and in all manifestations of individual and collective life" (634).

¹⁷⁹ Antonio Gramsci, quoted in George Hoare and Nathan Sperber, *An Introduction to Antonio Gramsci: His Life, Thought, and Legacy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 30.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Hoare and Sperber, *An Introduction to Antonio Gramsci*, 31.

¹⁸² Hoare and Sperber, *An Introduction to Antonio Gramsci*, 33, 34.

recognizing an intellectual's role: the *popular intellectual*, an intellectual whose connection to the people is emotive and passionate.¹⁸³ This may be taken to mean that, rhetorically, the *popular intellectual* as a rhetor makes strong use of pathos rhetoric, or emotional appeals connected to popular conditions. The popular intellectual can be either *organic*, *traditional*, or both. Muir reflects the characteristics of both an organic and traditional intellectual for the standards of the nineteenth century. He combined a genteel rhetorical refinement with a scientific acumen usually reserved for the halls of universities. The popular science of "botanizing" in America from the early nineteenth century to the early twentieth blurred the line between amateur and professional scientist.¹⁸⁴ The popular botanist (professional or amateur) was particularly appealing to genteel and middle-class sensibilities as one required a sort of physical exertion and intellectual rigor. Muir's performance as a botanizer and mountaineer reflected the ideal rough and refined popular intellectual of genteel discourse.

My consideration of Muir's rhetoric is also concerned with Gramsci's notions of *fascino* and *prestigio* (fascination and prestige); as semiotician Paul Thibault puts it, "the concept of fascino-prestigio suggests that social semiotic theory must also theorize the processes whereby one social group succeeds in imposing on some other group a particular set of social meaning-making practices that reproduces and serves the ideological interests and values of the first group in ways that are legitimated or naturalized as a kind of ideological second nature."¹⁸⁵ Prestige and attractiveness (to one's audience) buys rhetorical power by limiting or masking rhetorical barriers.

¹⁸³ Hoare and Sperber, *An Introduction to Antonio Gramsci*, 39.

¹⁸⁴ Elizabeth B. Keeney, *The Botanizers: Amateur Scientists in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 84-85.

¹⁸⁵ Paul J. Thibault, *Social Semiotics as Praxis, Text, Social Meaning-Making, and Nabakov's Ada*, 111.

The role of the intellectual is to create conceptions of the world that shape and guide daily practice. “Religious” conceptions of the world function to provide cognitive maps (or a cosmos) using the discourse of religion. This in turn provides a frame for meaning-making activity and for the disciplining of society using certain religious authorities. Reading Gramsci’s works as they relate to religion, one gets the notion that he was largely affected by the late nineteenth-century discourse on religion in the Euro-American context.¹⁸⁶ Specifically, Gramsci was reading religion heavily through Marx and Engels, as well as in the context of European Catholicism, Protestantism, and the Reformation. Often in Gramsci’s work religion is primarily an isolated sector of society; Gramsci does, however, question why a “secular” (as opposed to confessional) understanding of religion, which he calls “a unity of a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct,” may not be considered as ideology or politics.¹⁸⁷ One might note that Gramsci was concerned about the practicality of theory; he was not intellectually engaged in deconstructing the concept of “world religions,” despite his understanding of all social behavior as political, and therefore not wholly unique. Gramsci’s focus was on the relationship between *conceptions of the world* and power relations. It could be said that scholarship critical of conceptions of the universality of religion, religions, and religiousness are more Gramscian regarding the category of religion than Gramsci was himself.¹⁸⁸ As such, my analysis builds upon Gramsci’s larger body of work to frame a Gramscian approach to the study

¹⁸⁶ See, Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Marjorie Wheeler-Barclay, *The Science of Religion in Britain, 1860-1915* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

¹⁸⁷ Gramsci, *SPN*, 631.

¹⁸⁸ Important thinkers using Gramsci, but going further to interrogate the category of religion, are Bruce Lincoln, Craig Martin, and Malory Nye, to name a few. However, it is surprising how few scholars of religion explicitly engage Gramsci’s larger cadre of work regarding the category of religion considering the wide focus on postcolonialism, hegemony, power, and politics in the study of religion. There is much more territory to be explored regarding Gramsci’s relevance for interrogating the category of religion.

of religion and John Muir with strong consideration of discursive approaches to historical analysis.

Religion and the Botanizer's Popular Intellectual

Novels, articles, and textbooks made botanizers famous during Muir's life (and in the few decades preceding Muir's birth). Botany was popularly a source for natural theology, supported by Protestant communities and discourses. As tension between scientific and natural theology discourses emerged, challenging the role of natural theology in botanical discourse, figures like Muir emerged to reconcile intellectual conflicts.¹⁸⁹ Religion and historically related categories, such as spirituality, prayer, prophet, and devotion, are commonly present in Muir's writings and legacy. Very often one finds Muir comparing mountains to cathedrals, and nature narratives to gospel; Muir wrote in 1912 in *The Yosemite of the Hetch-Hetchy Valley*, which he fought so hard to protect from damming: "[Hetch-Hetchy] is a grand landscape garden, one of Nature's rarest and most precious mountain temples."¹⁹⁰ Folk, pop cultural, official government, and scholarly representations of Muir have made use of categories such as *sacred*, *prophet*, and *nature religion*. In a National Park Service's website biography of Muir, for example, the main biographical source is Robert Silverberg's *John Muir: Prophet Among the Glaciers* (New York: Putnam, 1972).¹⁹¹ In his remarks at Yosemite National Park on June 18, 2016, President Barack Obama combined his own myth-making rhetoric with Muir's. President Obama mythologized the Valley:

It's a park that captures the wonder of the world that changes you by being here. There's something sacred about this place. And I suppose that's why the walls of this valley were

¹⁸⁹ Keeney, *Botanizers*, 100-111. It was around the mid-nineteenth century when natural theology started to come into conflict with scientific discourse in the United States. Muir was first published around this time (1860's).

¹⁹⁰ John Muir, *The Yosemite*, 255.

¹⁹¹ "John Muir," *Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural National Historic Site* <https://www.nps.gov/thri/johnmuir.htm>.

referred to as cathedral walls, because here at Yosemite, we connect not just with our own spirit, but with something greater. It's almost like the spirit of America itself is right here.¹⁹²

President Obama mentioned Presidents Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt before Muir, braiding the ethos of the three for his myth-making rhetoric: "John Muir, a man who gave life to what's been called America's best idea: our national parks. As he said after his visit: 'We are not building this country of ours for a day. It is to last through the ages.'"¹⁹³

A theory of religion that is anti-essentialist and discursive seeks to situate "religion" as operational for the structuration of society and needs to critique and historicize the operation of such language.¹⁹⁴ Theses, such as those put forth by Michael P. Cohen, that argue that Muir departed from Christianity for forms of Buddhism or Taoism cut Muir off from his historical setting; Raymond Barnett has argued that Muir was a "gaiacentric" Taoist.¹⁹⁵ In contrast, some arguments that reclaim Muir as a Christian have relied on theological, not historical claims. For instance, Barnett argues that Muir's focus was on nature and never the God behind it:

*To Muir nature is God's beauty and love made manifest, and to him that is always exhilarating and supremely inspiring. But it is important to note that the emphasis is not on the God behind the Creation. Muir's attention and devotion is always directed to the specific "Godful" plants, animals, rocks, waters, clouds, and sky themselves. This contrasts with his contemporary religious poets such as Gerard Manley Hopkins, for example, in whose work the emphasis often seems to be more on the God behind His creation than the created work itself; the world is glorious because it illustrates the glory of the Creator. Not so for Muir, whose delight always centered in the phenomenon itself.*¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Barak Obama, "Remarks at Yosemite National Park, June 18, 2016," Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=117872>.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ See the works of Russell McCutcheon, Donald Wiebe, Talal Asad, and Kocku von Stuckrad. I borrow the term "structuration" for Anthony Giddens.

¹⁹⁵ Raymond Barnett, "John Muir and Godful Nature," *Religion* 3, no. 2 (2012): 266-288. Open access at <http://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/3/2/266/htm#B1-religions-03-00266>.

¹⁹⁶ Raymond Barnett, "John Muir and Godful Nature," <http://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/3/2/266/htm#B1-religions-03-00266>.

However, Barnett assumes an implicit authenticity for how one must talk about theology. Muir often wrote in both personal and public writings about God, especially that God was most authentically revealed in nature. As such, Muir's theological praxis of "reading" nature should be understood as describing the character and revelation of God. For instance, Muir stated in his Alaska journal that "God's love is manifest in the landscape as in a face."¹⁹⁷ Neither is this foreign to historical Christian discourse nor does Muir forego integrating the Bible into authorizing claims. Muir used the Bible rhetorically and for nature theology; Muir wrote in *Our National Parks*,

To an observer upon this adamantine old monument in the midst of such scenery, getting glimpses of the thoughts of God, the day seems endless, the sun stands still. Much faithless fuss is made over the passage in the Bible telling of the standing still of the sun for Joshua. Here you may learn that the miracle occurs for every devout mountaineer, for everybody doing anything worth doing, seeing anything worth seeing. One day is as a thousand years, a thousand years as one day [a reference to 2 Peter 3:8], and while yet in the flesh you enjoy immortality.¹⁹⁸

It is not foreign to historical Christian theology that a human might have access to the thoughts of God, in a sense. Muir may have been referring to Amos 4:13 or 1 Corinthians 2:16, here, in which God "declareth unto man what is his thought," and "who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ," respectively.¹⁹⁹

As I reconsider Muir *as belonging to a religion*, I give preference in my analysis to how Muir self-identified religiously or oriented himself to religious identities. Belonging should be theorized in light of anti-essentialist theorizing of religion. Another way of articulating this is to say that locating and analyzing Muir's *acts of identification* take precedence over constructing

¹⁹⁷ John Muir, *Cruise of the Corwin: Journal of the Artic Expedition of 1881 in Search of DeLong and the Jeanette* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917), 51.

¹⁹⁸ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 92-93.

¹⁹⁹ Muir read Greek and Latin, but this reflects the American Bible Society versions that Muir apparently favored as his personal library reveals.

<https://www.pacific.edu/Documents/library/Special%20Collections%20Forms/Muir%20Library/Muir%20Library%20by%20Author.pdf>

(or, more precisely, presuming) criteria for Muir's belonging to a religion. In discourse analysis, one makes sense of one's identities through one's *subject position*. Discourse analysts define the subject position as "the positioning of subjects within a discursive structure."²⁰⁰ How social actors orient themselves in all fashions of communication to other actors, social movements, and their discourses constructs their subject position. This thesis offers this alternative modality: an analysis of Muir's acts of identification, and the analysis of his subject position (discursive relationality) without positing an internal essence of identity.

Analyzing Muir's writing and legacy using a Gramscian analysis privileges the historical conditions that produced religion as a concept and Muir's authority in constructing religious discourse, while simultaneously exploring the social processes—such as prayer, devotion, and use of theological rhetoric—categorized as "religion." Gramsci's movement of thought tunes my analysis to observe the operations of power in genteel conceptualizations of class, race, space, and religion, as well as the settler conceptions of "religion" as a recognizable category or experience within Muir's legacy and his writings.

Cultivating the Forest of "Religion"

What has been proposed so far may be thought of as a cultural analysis.²⁰¹ Gramsci's position is that *culture* has no essence, but rather it is the process of struggle for power and production, a "succession of quotidian practices."²⁰² This is predicated on Gramsci's aversion to forms of essentialism; Gramsci's conception of the world is important for understanding the

²⁰⁰ David Howarth and Yannis Stavrakakis, "Introducing Discourse Theory," in *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemonies, and Social Change* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 13).

²⁰¹ Discourse and cultural analysis often go hand in hand. Many English and Communication departments share the labor of these two fields of inquiry, and it is often the case that they share methodological space.

²⁰² Hoare and Sperber, *An Introduction to Antonio Gramsci*, 38.

relationships between representations and practices of *culture*. Folklore, ideology, religion, hegemony: these are products and producers of conceptions of the world.²⁰³ Those practices have aesthetics and practical normalities, but they do not have internal, invisible mechanisms that necessitate their place in history. These conceptions are chiefly orientations for order and procedure, as well as for *being-in-the-world*.²⁰⁴ Contextual particularities (geography, class, ethnicity) produce ‘conceptions of the world’ (in Gramsci’s terms) that are often radically different.²⁰⁵ That is, the particularities in representation, in conceptions of the world, should be analyzed for their political potentialities and actualities. Instructive is Joel Wainwright’s reflection of Gramsci’s framing of *world*: “In the expression ‘conceptions of the world’, the ‘world’ is not an object. Nor does ‘world’ mean ‘nature’ here. Nor does the ‘world’ mean Earth or the planet. The ‘world’ in Gramsci’s ‘conception of the world’ means something closer to that which we are a part of, that makes us what we are, and yet resists our labor to achieve critical consciousness, to become other.”²⁰⁶ One may find that in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*, “religion” could be swapped for “conception of the world.”²⁰⁷ Extending Gramsci’s logic, and for this thesis, practices become *religionized*, which is to say that discursive activity places conceived religious activity in relation with other activity *as religious*. For instance, one may create a dichotomy between religion and politics.

The goal of this analysis is to historicize religious discourse and its place in nineteenth-century environmental and nationalist politics as they have supported settler colonialism. To accomplish this, the turn to a localized analysis of “religion” relies on a discursive theory of

²⁰³ Joel Wainwright, “On Gramsci’s ‘conceptions of the world’,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35 (2010): 507-521.

²⁰⁴ “Being-in-the-world” is primarily a Heideggerian concept.

²⁰⁵ Wainwright, “On Gramsci’s ‘Conceptions of the World’,” 508.

²⁰⁶ Wainwright, “On Gramsci’s ‘Conceptions of the World’,” 510.

²⁰⁷ Gramsci, *SPN*, 634. Gramsci envisions “religion” as one of a number of ‘conceptions of the world.’

religion: what was communicated and why and how it matters. The language of “religioning” and “religion-making,” as much as “myth-making,” functions to point to the construction of the religion. Whereas Gramsci observed this formation and proposed new constructions, I analyze the process and politics of the social life of religious discourse. For example, Muir’s language of wilderness as sacred space became central to political rhetoric, environmental advocacy, and National Parks artifacts. Yet Muir’s rhetoric was not without the fertile soil of American religious wilderness discourse, which made use of religious concepts in new frames and strategic constructs as the newness of experience for citizens of an expanding American empire and its field of power.

Religion is made, categorically, through the entanglement of discourse and practices. Nothing is inherently “religious,” rather, stuff becomes “religionized” by linguistic orientations. As Arvind-Pal S. Mandair and Markus Dressler frame it, “religion making” refers to “the way in which certain social phenomena are configured and reconfigured within the matrix of a world-religion(s) discourse. In other words, the notion refers to the reification of certain ideas, social formations, and practices as ‘religious’ in the conventional Western meaning of the term, thereby subordinating them to a particular knowledge regime of religion and its political, cultural, philosophical and historical interventions.”²⁰⁸

Malory Nye, recognizing that the Western category of “religion” does not always or necessarily show up in “emic discourses,” calls for a recognition of the use of categories in religious studies as in cultural studies (anthropology and other “culture discourses”).²⁰⁹

Awareness of the scholar’s orientation and contribution to the politics of demotic (folk,

²⁰⁸ Arvind-Pal S. Mandair and Markus Dressler, “Introduction: Modernity, Religion-Making, and the Postsecular,” in *Secularism and Religion-Making* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 18.

²⁰⁹ Malory Nye, “Religion, Post-Religionism, and Religioning: Religious Studies and Contemporary Cultural Debates,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 12, no. 1/4 (2000): 447-476.

subaltern, deconstructive) and dominant (hegemonic, constructive) discourses centers Nye's call for attentiveness to the operation of categorizing phenomena *as* religion. Nye writes, "Religioning is not a thing, with an essence, to be defined and explained."²¹⁰ He goes on: "A discourse of religioning . . . instead looks at religious influences and religious creativities and the political dynamics through which certain conceptualizations of religious authority are produced and maintained."²¹¹ More concisely, Nye contends that "conceptualization of religioning, therefore, is intended to focus scholarly attention on the ways in which religious identities, manifestations and power relations are produced through practice and performance. Moreover, the subject of study of scholars in this field is such practices, along with the discourses which shape and are shaped by them."²¹² When I employ the term "religion," it carries the understanding and weight of the aforementioned theoretical understanding, as a transit of empire, as a field of discourse crossing the expanded territories of the United States with legal, cultural, and social consequences. Muir, for example, did not *find religion*, per se, but took part in creating and recreating religious fields of discourse and power.

Classification Matters: Or, How Muir Could Do Things with Colonial Words

How did nature become American and sacred, what was lost and gained in the process, and for whom? This is both a historical and discursive analysis that takes as its data Muir's writings and writings about Muir. I operationalize *myth-making* to denote the process of constructing narratives that, following Bruce Lincoln, possess credibility and authority.²¹³ Muir's

²¹⁰ Nye, "Religion, Post-Religionism, and Religioning," 467.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), Kindle edition, 23..

myths and Muir-myths have a rhetorical dynamic that is central to this analysis. As Lincoln frames it, these narrative constructions are contestants for “paradigmatic truth,” which I understand as connected to *common sense*. American myth-making is American only in that it relies on the matrices of *common sense* and *habitus*, to conjure Pierre Bourdieu’s concept, to constitute what is American.²¹⁴

Nature, nation, and religion factored prominently in Muir’s writings and legacy, yet he developed these concepts relying on dispositions of settler colonial ways of conceptualizing the world—largely Euro-Christian and expansionist, with hegemonic Euro-American racial theories. Muir reflected and his writings still reflect what was and is acceptable to Americans in describing nature, nation, and religion. The ease and frequency by which Muir and his followers used particular language demonstrate how Americans filter their experiences and politics through the lens of nature and religion. Moreover, the history and contemporary practices of national preservation spaces are actively engaged in the politics of remembrance and sovereignty regarding indigenous people, including what has often been considered their *religion*. This is evident in the naming practices and narratives of indigenous histories in the National Park territories.²¹⁵

American nationalism has relied on religious discourse, often using moral, spiritual, and theological language to construct and perform American identities. Historian Sam Haselby has shown that many Americans have used the discourse of religion—highly Christocentric conceptually—in place-making discourses and making sense of their colonial experiences.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), Kindle Edition, 78.

²¹⁵ “Telling All Americans’ Stories: Indigenous Heritage Featured Places,” <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/indigenousplaces.htm>.

²¹⁶ Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford, 2015).

Natural theology, heavily Protestant in tone, factored prominently in rhetoric in support of national preservation space development. John Muir integrated religious discourse into his activism for the preservation of “wild” spaces for recreational and spiritual purposes, placing the struggle for wilderness into the “eternal” realm; Muir’s activism continued and contributed to the tradition of religious environmental activism rhetoric.²¹⁷ Ideologies of Christian missionary discourse have entangled with national and colonial expansion; civilization missions extended into larger social contexts, disciplining both citizen and “savage.” The discursive figures of the citizen and the savage in settler colonial rhetoric (news articles, novels, travel literature) relied on and reified settler colonial (Gramscian) common sense. Talking about “expansion” without referencing colonial activity and indigenous displacement contributes to the mystification and naturalization of domination, something a Gramscian analysis seeks to address and critique. Because “nature” is an empty signifier, I have given attention to its discursive construction in relationship to social sites of power and conflict to provide the historical context of Muir’s myth-making activities. Geographer Carolyn Finney states,

You have John Muir talking about preservation of the land and the idea of the national parks as these beautiful spaces that are going to be public treasures for everyone, every American. . . . But meanwhile, enslaved people had just gotten freed, were given land, had that land taken away, and then were living under the threat of Jim Crow segregation for all those years afterward. That’s a real cognitive dissonance: There were words on paper saying these protected spaces were meant for everyone, but we know they weren’t really meant for everyone, because everything else that was going on in the country at the time indicated that.²¹⁸

This cognitive dissonance has created an American ideology of wilderness that has sustained preservation discourse since Muir’s time. Addressing the myths of Muir and American

²¹⁷ Muir, for instance, in an address to the Sierra Club in 1895 argued that fighting for American forests constituted “part of the eternal conflict between right and wrong.” Steven Fox, *John Muir and His Legacy*, 107.

²¹⁸ Francie Latour, “Hiking While Black: The Untold Story,” *Boston Globe*, June 20, 2014. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/06/20/hiking-while-black-the-untold-story-black-people-great-outdoors/ssRvXFYogkZs2e4RX3z6JP/story.html>.

wilderness, however pleasant they may seem, is a matter of ethical responsibility. As Margret Grebowicz states, “All modern nationalism depends on the linking of political regulation to desire, hope, optimism, and wellness, but it is in the United States that this linkage is accomplished so effectively by the idea-image of wilderness, which makes it difficult to see as nationalism.”²¹⁹ For instance, Section 6 of the General Allotment Act (The Dawes Severalty Act) of 1887, which collectivized the United States government’s dealings with American Indians, called for citizen rights for those who “[have] adopted the habits of civilized life.”²²⁰ Christianity was a component of a civilized life in the eyes of the government, enjoying legal advantages. Government regulations, like the Dawes Act of 1887, gave preference to Anglo-American religious agents, such as missionaries and reformers (e.g., the Quaker Friends of the Indians) and the schools they established, regarding land use:

if any religious society or other organization is now occupying any of the public lands to which this act is applicable, for religious or educational work among the Indians, the Secretary of the Interior is hereby authorized to confirm such occupation to such society or organization, in quantity not exceeding one hundred and sixty acres in any one tract, so long as the same shall be so occupied, on such terms as he shall deem just; but nothing herein contained shall change or alter any claim of such society for religious or educational purposes heretofore granted by law. And hereafter in the employment of Indian police, or any other employees in the public service among any of the Indian tribes or bands affected by this act, and where Indians can perform the duties required, those Indians who have availed themselves of the provisions of this act and become citizens of the United States shall be preferred.²²¹

An expansive network of settler colonial land development, shaped by popular middle-class, genteel concepts of land use (recreation, capitalist resource management, civic expansion), reflected hegemonic ideologies of human relations to the earth. Indigenous ways of life were

²¹⁹ Margret Grebowicz, *The National Park to Come* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 26. Kindle Edition.

²²⁰ Section 6 of “Transcript of Dawes Act (1887), <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=50&page=transcript>.

²²¹ Section 5 of “Transcript of Dawes Act (1887), <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=50&page=transcript>.

seen by white, middle-class settlers as a hindrance to both human and land development, and these ways were to be suppressed.

Religious discourse, such as the Religious Crimes Code of 1883, used indigenous ways of life and *religionized* them while describing them as primitive and closer to “nature,” isolating and erasing indigenous self-representation; Anglo-Saxon Protestant religious hegemony politically dominated how American cultural productions conceptualized nature and humanity.²²² The Romanticized art and literature of Albert Bierstadt, William Keith, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Muir, Henry David Thoreau, and their ilk still represent, for most Americans, American nature. Erasure of particularities and categories of indigenous discourse was a very real danger, even when well-meaning settler colonial advocates desired to be of aid.²²³ For instance, the Protestant “friends of the Indian,” a social reformer group, lauded government reservation agents for providing schools that “Americanized” Indians by “focusing on manual labor, forcing the English language, and American fashion” because they felt that the Jesuits were unfit for the task.²²⁴

Nature Religion as Colonial Common Sense Theory

Christianity’s relationship to capitalism and its role in ecological degradation, highlighted in the work of Lynn White Jr. and his detractors,²²⁵ combined with rhetorical approaches to salvage Muir’s legacy, have popularized another category: nature religion. By attempting to

²²² Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle of the American West* (New York: Oxford, 2018); Eve Daria-Smith, *Religion, Race, Rights: Landmarks in the History of Anglo-American Law* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2010), 232-233; Mark Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford, 2015).

²²³ Mark Stoll, *Inherit The Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford, 2015).

²²⁴ Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 100-101.

²²⁵ Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science*, 155 (1967): 1203-1207.

resituate Muir outside hegemonic, normative identities, placing him in solidarity with indigenous peoples, nature religion theories assume that Christians do not primarily and frequently concern themselves with matters of the material world centrally in the same way that indigenous traditions do. However, the signifier “nature” doesn’t have universal application or meaning across cultural boundaries, which should draw more caution than it has in nature religion scholarship, especially Muir scholarship.²²⁶ The homogenizing concept of “nature religion” developed within (primarily) nineteenth-century European and American intellectual societies, as did the tangential concept “natural religion” among such scholars as E. B. Tylor and F. Max Müller.²²⁷ Muir’s ordering, orienting concepts (such as nature and culture, or religion and politics) were not always sympathetic to indigenous people. Moreover, as philosopher Thomas Norton-Smith states, “Sense experiences are identified, categorized, and ordered—worlds are constructed—through the use of language and other symbol systems.”²²⁸ Muir’s language reflected the genteel theological discourse of affect (combining sense, emotion, and meaning) of the “Boston man,” not of the Tlingit of Alaska or the Californian Mono and Ahwaneechee peoples. As communication historian Daniel Lee Henry has argued, in opposition to the hegemonic Victorian, Romantic Protestant conceptions of space and place, Orthodox Christianity offered a significant amount of theological thinking that resonated with Tlingit concepts of space and place.²²⁹ Despite developments in religious concepts between Tlingit and settler (both

²²⁶ For instance, as noted above, Albanese recognizes cultural differences, yet errs on the side of constructing too strong a homology between Euro-American and indigenous cosmologies. Albanese, *Nature Religion in America*, 19.

²²⁷ Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Cultures: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*, vol II (London: John Murray, 1871); F. Max Müller, *Natural Religion* (London: Longman’s, Greene, & Co., 1892).

²²⁸ Thomas M. Norton-Smith, *The Dance of Person and Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010) Kindle Edition Locations 268-269.

²²⁹ Daniel Lee Henry, *Across the Shaman’s River: John Muir, the Tlingit Stronghold, and the Opening of the North* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2017), 16. It may be worth noting that there was significant struggle between “evangelical” (various Protestant denominations) and Orthodox missionaries in the Tlingits’ communities.

Russian Orthodox and American Anglo-Protestant) groups, there existed important differences that reflected a parallax between the Tlingit oral traditions and Christian theology. Muir was fascinated by anti-anthropocentrism in native thought, which did not hold to the human-supremacy that has dominated Euro-American philosophy. Muir compared the Tlingit to Louis Agassiz in believing that animals had souls; moreover, Muir understood the Tlingit as respectful to nonhuman animals, rejecting even a verbal maligning of nonhuman animals. He wrote, “Before the whites came most of the Thlinkits [*sic*] held, with Agassiz, that animals have souls, and that it was wrong and unlucky to even speak disrespectfully of the fishes or any of the animals that supplied them with food.”²³⁰ Muir illustrated this by telling a story of the “superstitions” of a shaman who, when advising a man whose son fell ill, stated that the boy “lost his soul” because he had made fun of a crawfish.²³¹ Muir noted that the stories that his Tlingit friends shared with him included their religion, their cosmologies, and their customs that tied together “the next world, the stars, plants, the behavior and language of animals under different circumstances, manner of getting a living, etc.”²³²

As nineteenth-century anthropologists created colonial knowledge of the peoples they were sent to observe, they classified people, as botanists and biologists did for plants and animals, in ways that reflected Christian hegemony over Euro-American sciences; categories classifying people, plants, and practices, for example, coincided with colonial projects of industrialism and imperialism, favoring dominant ideologies of theological anthropology (sometimes called the “Protestant work ethic”).²³³ The works of religious studies scholars David

²³⁰ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 235-236.

²³¹ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 236.

²³² Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 123-124.

²³³ David Chidester, *Empire of Religion: Imperialism and Comparative Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 133; Keeney, *Botanizers*, 13.

Chidester and Jason Josephson-Storm, however, have demonstrated the paradox and myths of a disenchanted scientific modernity of colonial knowledge creators (and creations) which saw indigenous, pre- or nonindustrial cultures as more superstitious than industrial ones.²³⁴

Muir was a reader of colonial scholars, such as Alexander von Humboldt, as well having been a product of the scientific cultures that produced said scholars (e.g., the University of Wisconsin). His conception of the world was shaped by these Euro-American scientific descriptions. As Muir's life traversed across the continent, from his Wisconsin farm days to his expeditions in Alaska, Muir continued to view the world through the training of settler colonial science. Muir applied his scientific tools to the world around him, but he was also involved in the project of resource acquisition, which, much like the Russians before them, the American empire used to shape relationships with indigenous populations. Examining the case of the Tlingit people whom Muir admired on his Alaska expeditions demonstrates that changes in social realities (such as alcoholism, resource depletion, and loss of place-making and production traditions) followed the changes in linguistic and practical assimilation.²³⁵

Muir's conceptual framework and his cultural production (including his observations in *Travels in Alaska*) were shaped by settler common sense and the sciences, developed prior to his engaging Native Americans. Genteel ideologies of nature structured scientific and recreational practices that produced preservation resources (parks, caches of artifacts, and observable specimens). Nature, especially in Victorian scientific discourse, relied heavily on cultural assumptions within Victorian humanism (Christian or not), such as the exceptionalism of the human being (culminating in white property-owning citizens) that provided a special place for

²³⁴ Chidester, *Empire of Religion*; Jason Ā. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

²³⁵ Thomas F. Thorton, *Being and Place among the Tlingit (Culture, Place, and Nature)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 169-171.

humans as privileged beings with “natural” beings, resources, and processes at their disposal; the discourse of “nature” also functioned to structure the civic-self across transatlantic scientific societies.²³⁶ The Victorian period was characterized by industrial and philosophical developments, Western expansion, and capitalist imperialism. Transatlantic cultural consumption and production operated to discipline “civilized” ways of life. As historian Matthew Stanley has demonstrated, the development of “naturalistic” and “theistic” science shared a great deal of methodological assumptions and a lot of social space in Victorian British science.²³⁷ The production of natural science, and thus “nature,” has always been part of political activity. To counter assumptions within the Euro-American imagination about the ecological innocence of subalterns in territories controlled or impacted by Western colonialism, important studies by scholars such as Amita Baviskar, Ramachandra Guha, and Bron Taylor have demonstrated that societies (and what often is called ‘religions’) that hold nonhuman beings (plant and animal) as “sacred” are not necessarily more advantageous for biodiversity (or what ecological ethics frames as ecological friendliness).²³⁸ The idea that groups such as Native Americans are somehow “closer to nature” relies on an essentialist and Romantic colonial fantasy. The assumption that indigenous peoples are somehow “chief practitioners of nature religion,” as Albanese suggests, even after arguing that there is no mirror category of “nature” in those

²³⁶ Diarmind A. Finnigen, *Natural History Societies and Civic Culture in Victorian Scotland* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016), see especially chapter 4, “Natural History and Self-Culture.”

²³⁷ Matthew Stanley, *Huxley’s Church and Maxwell’s Demons: From Theistic Science to Naturalistic Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). In light of American scientific developments during the Victorian period, Stanley pushes too far in suggesting that this was a “distinctly British creation” (2); however, his book is helpful for problematizing any narratives of strong separations. It is better to speak of transatlantic scientific discourse.

²³⁸ Amita Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Developments in the Narmada Valley* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) and “Tribal Politics and the Discourse of Environmentalism,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 31/2 (1997): 195-224; Ramachandra Guha, “Ideological Trends in Indian Environmentalism,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 3 (1988): 2578-81; Bron Taylor, “Earthen Spirituality or Cultural Genocide?: Radical Environmentalism’s Appropriation of Native American Spirituality,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 10/4 (1998): 1-42; Emma Tomlison, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity: The Limits of Religious Environmentalism* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 5-7.

societies, has made its way into the works of leading scholars of religion and nature.²³⁹ As such, essentialist notions of ecological responsibility and religion, and ecological responsibility and degrees of development of societies are examples of myth-making dynamics. Post-essentialist (discursive) theories help examine how localized conceptions of religion, nation, and nature resist essentialist conceptions which have been used to flatten out historical particularities and colonial relations.

Gramsci, Religious Hegemony, and the Genteel Languages of Persuasion

Following Gramsci, all language, and thus categories produced by scientific, artistic, and popular discourse, is the result of human actions and orientations. Language habits and choices are critical for situating power in the intellectual labor of religion-making, nation-making, and myth-making. Gramsci focused on the relationship of struggle to social order when he thought about religion; that has inspired the focus of this thesis on John Muir's social networks, education, and historical conditions as they contended for power through meaning-making. This thesis frames the approach described above as what Grelle calls a "critical-contextual approach"—which situates its subject in its material, social, and historical context—which I use to analyze Muir's class, race, and cultural conflicts in relation to his position as a product of genteel Scottish and American societies.²⁴⁰ That is to say that Muir as an intellectual produced conceptions of the world using myth-making techniques and religion-making discourse. Thus, this thesis does not assume that Muir's influence was completely self-generated without a historically created field of power that provided for the conditions of his influence as a major authoritative figure for environmental and nationalist rhetoric and discourse.

²³⁹ Catherine L. Albanese, *Reconsidering Nature Religion* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 5.

²⁴⁰ Grelle, *Antonio Gramsci and the Question of Religion*, 66.

In Gramscian thought, “moral-religious discourses” constitute “languages of persuasion,” constructing identities and boundaries and norms of conduct.²⁴¹ The emphasis on “languages of persuasion” frames all the stuff that gets classified as religion as rhetorical, constructive, and political. Gramsci’s pairing religion with arms, as something *other than* arms, contrasts religion to hegemony (the other side of coercion).²⁴² Gramsci’s *counter-hegemony* opens up space to analyze how religion is employed as a means of resistance as well as dominance. The Religious Crimes Codes of 1883—which established the legal and political power for colonial “Courts of Indian Offenses” to suppress shamanism and traditional dances as well as funerary destruction of property—is one example of colonial religious discourse of “true religion” and rights; this will be discussed later in detail. The learning of such languages of persuasion, and thus the dynamics of hegemony, is largely a matter of education. In the Euro-American context, the church, school, and home created an educational complex.²⁴³ Following sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, rhetorical historian Dorothy Broaddus demonstrates that the concepts of social and cultural capital help us understand the influence of “elite” and “upper-class” individuals after 1870.²⁴⁴ The nineteenth-century university system, which was largely influenced by transatlantic academic discourse, shaped the cultural production of America’s intellectuals and their construction of consensus (or, in Gramscian terms, hegemony). Centrally situated at Harvard University (though expanded through university cultures nation-wide), genteel culture produced numerous Unitarian ministers, transcendentalist writers, scientists, and poets who came to define American intellectual identity.

²⁴¹ Grelle, 73-4.

²⁴² Grelle, 74. Gramsci, following Francesco Guicciardini, understood religion through the example of the institutional churches of Europe. However, this thesis contends that there is still room to collapse “religion” into the larger category of hegemony to retain a strong analysis no matter how hegemonic activity is categorized. The categorization, the language choices, are to be seen as an amalgam of strategic and socially conditioned actions.

²⁴³ For a study of the intersections of churches and homes, see Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America: 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

²⁴⁴ Dorothy C. Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric: Writing High Culture in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 7.

Broaddus argues convincingly that Harvard graduates took over from Puritanical forbearers in cultural production. Religious discourse contributed much to justifications for the dominance of Anglo-American colonialism. For example, Muir's poetics mystified a very real, material struggle over land and sovereignty within American "wilderness" areas, and Muir's language reflected genteel sentiments shaped by colonial common sense, which argued that individual self-culture offered the answers to social problems. Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing (1780-1842), hero to the Transcendentalist and genteel movements, described self-culture as "the care every man owes to himself, to the unfolding and perfecting of his nature," which, Channing argued, "is religious."²⁴⁵ And yet, while an abolitionist, Channing still championed the racial ideology in which whiteness was superior to blackness, arguing against intermarriage.

Complexities of racial ideologies among Victorian genteel intellectuals should be parsed out through historical analysis of socially constructed spaces. Racializing wilderness, as a socially constructed space, was common in nineteenth-century American cultural politics. And that legacy still affects environmental and cultural politics—and their relationships to religion—today.²⁴⁶ Muir's discursive and practical contributions to (and the ways that scholars talk about those contributions to) religion and wilderness were shaped by the complexities of Victorian genteel racial discourses.

Against narratives of a departure or conversion from "traditional religions," usually signified by labeling an individual's religion as "nature religion" (in the environmental humanities and social sciences), in this chapter I analyze religious discourse through Gramscian critical-contextual analysis; this requires us to reject religious identifications that Muir himself

²⁴⁵ William Ellery Channing, *Self-Culture: An Address Introductory to the Franklin Lectures, Delivered at Boston, October 1838* (Boston: Dutton and Wentworth Printer, 1838), 11.

²⁴⁶ Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African-Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 68.

did not use to describe himself or rhetorically employ. An anti-essentialist approach to the analysis of religion requires that no list of qualifications may qualify Muir *as a* particular religious follower. This is because an anti-essentialist approach observes criteria for belonging instead of arguing for criteria of belonging. Instead, rhetorical dynamics of identification *create* religious identity, and that identity can always be negotiated and employed strategically. Furthermore, I view identity as both an orientation to one's environment as well as a source of social and cultural capital. In doing so, such an approach will situate the agency afforded to Muir by his ability to maneuver social power structures through acts of identification, however indirect. Muir's role as an intellectual of the genteel class was shaped by his religious acts of identification and ability to demonstrate his cultural capital and provided the means to express his *fascino-prestigio* as an individual who held the cultural keys to power. Gramsci's terminology allows us to create a lens that explores Muir's "power of character," in fellow genteel intellectual Edward T. Channing's terminology.²⁴⁷ Moreover, I will critically approach the "naturalization" (the making natural, right, and *a priori* of something) of Muir's discourse and authority. Gramsci further provides an antagonistic, critical lens to Muir's philosophical Romanticism as well as that of many of his interpreters. I do this for the purpose of demonstrating the historical and cultural particularities of Muir's approach to religious discourse.

²⁴⁷ Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 37.

CHAPTER 2: WHOSE NATURE? WHOSE RELIGION?: AN ANALYSIS OF JOHN MUIR AS A GRAMSCIAN INTELLECTUAL OF THE AMERICAN GENTEEL CLASS

Muir's genteel upbringing started in Scotland, in a house and family fit for such a social class. Throughout his life Muir remained close to the literature and social status of genteel expectations; his time in the mountains only served to elevate him as a sort of prophet. Appreciated by the likes of Theodore Roosevelt, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Asa Gray, and Nikola Tesla, John Muir had become a household name by the time he visited the graves of Emerson and Thoreau in 1893.²⁴⁸ In 1895 Muir wrote to author and naturalist Robert Underwood Johnson about job offers at the Institute of Technology in Boston (now Massachusetts Institute of Technology); Muir had received this offer from John Daniel Runkle (acting president of the institute from 1868-70 and president from 1870-1880), while Harvard scientist Asa Gray also invited Muir to find his professional place at Gray's university.²⁴⁹ Muir rejected Emerson's advice that he was "needed by the young men in our colleges. Solitude is a sublime mistress, but an intolerable wife."²⁵⁰ And yet it was Muir's very distance from city life (which came along with the life of the professor) that provided an allure to his intellect.

Insufficient attention has been brought to Muir's social and economic position, or the dynamics of Muir's political subjectivity. In this chapter the conversation about John Muir shifts towards discourse analysis, analyzing how Muir's words and legacy functioned during his time. Much of the trajectory of previous Muir scholarship focused on the definition of "Muir's religion."²⁵¹ This chapter looks at how various genteel discourses of religion, such as theological

²⁴⁸ John Muir, "Letter to Louie Strenzel Muir," *John Muir: His Life, Letters, and Other Writings*, 310-313.

²⁴⁹ John Muir, "To Robert Underwood Johnson, Martinez [California], May 3rd, 1895," *John Muir: His Life, Letters, and Other Writings*, 321.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Catherine L. Albanese, *Nature Religion in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Raymond Barnett, *Earth Wisdom: John Muir, Accidental Taoist, Charts Humanity's Only Future on a Changing Planet* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2016); Jeffrey Bilbro, "'Preserving God's Wilderness' for

texts, acts of self-identification, and religio-ethical discourse, provided the conditions for Muir to influence society as a religious authority, as his religious discourse would be used for generations to inspire environmental action and nation identity, from presidential addresses to quotes in the buildings of National Parks. This chapter demonstrates how John Muir became a *religious intellectual* for the genteel class of American society through his literary, oratorical, and political discourse. Furthermore, this chapter discloses the impact that Muir had on American cultural politics by synthesizing the eloquence of America's high culture, genteel cultural production with a theological nationalism and Romantic environmentalism.

From Boston to Yosemite: Constructing the Genteel Class

Rhetorical historian Dorothy C. Broaddus has demonstrated how the Boston intellectual scene during the nineteenth century was shaped by the dynamics of the “genteel tradition,” a concept that originated with Harvard philosophy professor George Santayana’s 1911 address, “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy.”²⁵² Santayana framed the genteel tradition as the “high culture” constitution of moral and intellectual development for early American culture, with Harvard University as the center of its development. Heavily influenced by Scottish Common Sense philosophy, Moderate Calvinist intellectual and theological traditions, and Scottish Enlightenment ideas, a “high culture” intellectual tradition was formulating and constructing an “American tradition” that emphasized a collaboration of “self-culture” with civic

Redemptive Baptism,” *Christianity and Literature* 61, 4 (Summer 2012): 589; Jeffrey Bilbro, *Loving God’s Wilderness: The Christian Roots of Ecological Ethics in American Literature* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015); Adam M. Sowards, “Spiritual Egalitarianism: John Muir’s Religious Environmentalism,” in *John Muir in Historical Perspective*, ed. Sally S. Miller (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Dennis Williams, *God’s Wilds: John Muir’s Vision of Nature* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).

²⁵² Dorothy C. Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric: Writing High Culture in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 11.

ethics.²⁵³ Scottish Common Sense philosophy articulated a vision of a ‘shared human capacity for perception’ that expressed a democratized ability to perceive truth, following the Reformation.²⁵⁴ Broaddus argues that the Arminianism and Moderate Calvinism of Scotland, which provided the Scottish Common Sense philosophy and ethos of ‘character over belief’ that shaped genteel culture, had prepared the ground from which American Unitarianism originated in New England in the mid-1700s. The Scottish (and larger European) Enlightenment shaped the political philosophy of federalism and republicanism.²⁵⁵ Muir’s contemporaries and interlocutors historian Edward Channing and Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing, philosopher and psychologist William James, one-time Unitarian minister Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Harvard’s other Unitarian ministers were products of this intellectual convention. Unitarianism shaped Muir’s mentor, amateur botanist, activist, and writer Jeanne Carr, whom he got to know while studying at the University of Wisconsin, and likely also shaped Muir’s own rhetorical and logical style, which emphasized ethical and progressive readings of theology and biblical studies; this was received well by more educated (which was often a matter of social class) citizens. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment intellectual traditions of Church of Scotland minister and moderate Calvinist Francis Hutcheson, British philosopher and founder of the Scottish School of Common Sense Thomas Reid, and Church of Scotland minister and University of Edinburgh professor of rhetoric Hugh Blair were the rhetorical, literary, and philosophical minds of American genteel culture. Especially influential on genteel culture were the emphases on civic duty and ethical responsibility throughout intellectual and cultural production, such as sermons, books, and poetry. Scottish moral philosophy and rhetorical

²⁵³ Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 21.

²⁵⁴ Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 27.

²⁵⁵ Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 14, 21.

education (connected to logic pedagogy) shaped the humanities in North America, as well as contributing a philosophy of the “right to resistance,” or the justification for physical political (and martial) resistance. Scottish Common Sense philosophy impacted U.S. Constitutional framing and public moral discourse.²⁵⁶

Genteel cultural ideology was concerned with the cultivation of the self, the family, and the nation: the trinity of society. It was Scottish Common Sense that shaped the moral and aesthetic rhetoric of a perception and rationality perceived as a universal human faculty, and thus archetypal of the most essential human being.²⁵⁷ But this universality was a fantasy imposed by genteel intellectuals (comprised of politicians and educators) on generations of American citizens and colonial subjects in the expectations of social behaviors. This was evinced by the Religious Crimes Codes of 1883 and the government support for religious boarding schools, which many indigenous children were forced into through a rhetoric that presented indigenous ways of life as lacking the common sense perception of religiousness and civilized behavior.²⁵⁸ Hard labor complemented the learning of “self-culture,” which promoted virtue and morals as a function of citizenship.²⁵⁹ “High culture” was practically the expression of hegemonic cultural ideology, reflecting the preferences of the “refined,” wealthy classes of society. It is appropriate that Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. described the elites of the Boston scene as “Brahmins”; like Brahmins, the genteel class positioned itself to construct social hegemonies and nationalist identity through, for example, the shaping of pedagogical cultures in the public and private school system.²⁶⁰ William Howard Taft, Yale professor, wrote in 1914 that “in the struggle for

²⁵⁶ Hideo Tanaka, “The Scottish Enlightenment and its Influence on the American Enlightenment,” *The Kyoto Economic Review* 79 (2010): 16-39, 24.

²⁵⁷ Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 20-21.

²⁵⁸ Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country*, 103.

²⁵⁹ Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 83.

²⁶⁰ Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 11. Broaddus develops this in the first chapter of *Genteel Rhetoric*.

the elevation of the individual... religion and education are the strongest instrumentalities that we know.”²⁶¹ Yet the meaning of education, and what it means to be genteel, was debated in 1914, the year that Muir died. The principal of the Pullman Free School of Manual Training in Pullman, Illinois, Laenas G. Weld, argued that genteel culture and self-cultivation should include manual labor.²⁶² Muir, the mountain-man and industrialist (sawmill engineer and inventor), exemplified one who would live the principles of refined literary tastes in a body hardened by physical labor and industrious intellect. Although he lived far from Boston, Muir represented the values of genteel discourse and culture that stretched across the nation, elevating his contributions to the sphere of public, civic behavior; that is, Muir provided intellectual fodder for understanding the performativity of sociality and citizenry. He merely did so in the wilderness. The education system that Muir helped construct and influence during his time in California was shaped by the literature of the genteel culture. John Swett, Muir’s friend and “father of the California public school system,” described Muir’s lasting impact on Swett in his 1911 book *Public Education in California: Its Origin and Development, with Personal Reminiscences of Half a Century*. Swett made note in the book of Muir’s ability as a “keen observer and poetic interpreter of nature.” Swett called two of Muir’s books, *The Mountains of California* and *Our National Parks*, “invaluable to all lovers of mountain and forest scenery and to teachers interested in nature.”²⁶³ Swett takes note also of Muir’s time with the Swett family and William Keith, the famous painter who frequented the Swett house.

²⁶¹ William Howard Taft, “The College and the New Social Order,” in *Religious Education* Volume 9 (Chicago: The Religious Education Association, February 1914- December 1914), 337.

²⁶² Laenas G. Weld, “The Socialization of the College Curriculum,” *Religious Education* Volume 9 (Chicago: The Religious Education Association, February 1914- December 1914), 333-334.

²⁶³ John Swett, *Public Education in California: Its Origins and Development, with Personal Reminiscences of Half a Century* (New York: American Book Company, 1911), 233.

Muir and the Raising of an Intellectual

Considering gentility and its relevance to Muir and religion is aided by the conceptual work of Antonio Gramsci. A *critical-contextual* framework for a Gramscian *popular intellectual* (henceforth ‘intellectual’) will refresh what I intend to signify with the term and how it applies to this analysis of Muir and his position and influence during late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century American social life. The intellectual’s primary function is to provide conceptions of the world that societies may look to for guidance or affirmation. According to Gramsci, these conceptions of the world are *not* products of “pure thought,” isolated from the historical conditions that fashioned the intellectual; rather, the knowledge that the intellectual produces is shaped by the society that recognizes it’s intellectual.²⁶⁴ Muir often has been labeled a prophet by his admirers and those who study him, ranging from the Reverend Benjamin A. Goodridge, minister at the Harvard Unitarian Church and then in Santa Barbara, who in 1914 called Muir a “prophet of our own California mountains” in *The Pacific Unitarian*,²⁶⁵ to Muir biographer and prolific fiction and nonfiction author Robert Silverberg, who titled his 1972 young adult biography of Muir *John Muir, Prophet Among the Glaciers*.²⁶⁶ Sociologist Max Weber’s concept of the *prophet*, which may seem appropriate given the frequency with which Muir has been labeled as such, is, however, inferior to Gramsci’s *intellectual* because it is Gramsci’s concept that better accounts for the historical social conditions that made Muir’s persuasion and authority as a “prophet” possible. For what is a prophet but a Gramscian intellectual with passion? It is a mistake to overlook the genealogy of the intellect for the—still important—performativity of the passion.

²⁶⁴ Katie Crehan, *Gramsci’s Common Sense*, 19.

²⁶⁵ Benjamin A. Goodridge, “John Muir, The Prophet,” *The Pacific Unitarian* (San Francisco, Pacific Unitarian Conference, 1914) vol. 23, 1, 99.

²⁶⁶ Robert Silverberg, *John Muir, Prophet Among the Glaciers* (New York: Putnam, 1972).

John Muir's social life was profoundly shaped by key individuals. Insight is gained regarding Muir's role as a Gramscian intellectual of the genteel class through studying his relationship with his mentor, Jeanne Carr. The relationships Muir had with his teachers and colleagues at the University of Wisconsin (from 1861 to 1863) were possibly his most important resources. Without Muir's relationship with Jeanne Carr, he would have drifted into historical obscurity. It was Carr who brought Muir to Yosemite in 1868, introduced him to Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1871, and influenced his theological thinking through the introduction of a large body of genteel literature. The impact Jeanne Carr had on Muir was reciprocated. The connections between Boston and the greater East Coast intellectual societies and Muir's social network are profound.

Muir's relationship to formal education also shaped his development as a public intellectual. After his family's departure from Scotland in 1849 when he was ten years old, Muir received merely two years of formal public schooling before he arrived at the University of Wisconsin in 1861 at twenty-three years of age. From the natural theology of Thomas Dick to the novels of Walter Scott, Muir had read widely and passionately as a child in Scotland and Wisconsin, despite his father's disapproval for reasons of theological authority (Daniel Muir rarely authorized sources outside the Christian Bible). Often having to rise early in the morning to have time to read prior to beginning farm chores, though not as early as John awoke for his studies, the Muir children eventually took the brunt of the farm work from Daniel, who traveled as an itinerant preacher.²⁶⁷ Muir's Wisconsin neighbors, such as Philip Gray and his family, who were fellow followers of the Restorationists Alexander and Thomas Campbell, allowed their children to read in Romantic poetry and other formative literature.²⁶⁸ John Muir's other

²⁶⁷ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 54.

²⁶⁸ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 59.

neighbors all went to churches of various denominations, visiting each other and crossing “Old World” boundaries.²⁶⁹ Later letters from a schoolhouse friend of Muir demonstrate fond memories of speeches the children heard in Wisconsin; however, Muir’s childhood efforts at poetry reflect Muir’s critical attitude towards formal education as he experienced it, though he would not reject public education outright. Muir’s independent educational sense and acumen is reflected especially in his organization of learning in a rural context in Wisconsin. Lacking the resources often characteristic of more urban educational cultures, the young Muir organized a book trade among local farms, effectively collecting works of poetry, literature, novels, scientific works, and theology. Despite his father Daniel’s objections to much of John’s consumption of non-biblical literature, Muir persisted in educating himself with the help of a network of book holders in his community.²⁷⁰

While at the University of Wisconsin, Muir expressed his literary acumen in his co-founding of the Athenae Literary and Debating Society, which according to his classmates and fellow Society architects was quite successful.²⁷¹ Muir’s ability to articulate poetic constructions of nature were not unaffected by his ability as a rhetor. He was quite familiar with social organizing. The farm home library network and the Sierra Club are evidence that Muir was a man of not only literary acumen, but also organizational prowess.

John Muir’s literary expertise was rivaled only by his creativity and talent as an inventor. Indeed, if it were not for Muir gaining attention at the Wisconsin State Agricultural Fair in 1860 for his mechanical inventions, his subsequent invitation to attend the University of Wisconsin, and especially his meeting with Jeanne Carr and her husband, science professor Ezra Slocum

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ William Frederic Badè, *John Muir: His Life, Letters, and Other Writings*, 48.

²⁷¹ William Frederic Badè, *John Muir: His Life, Letters, and Other Writings*, 68.

Carr (who influenced Muir's seeing God in the natural sciences), Muir's name may never have gained the status and influence that it did. Jeanne also helped Muir's influence, such as his gaining the attention of such figures as Ralph Waldo Emerson, professor John Daniel Runkle of the Boston Institute of Technology (later M.I.T.), who provided Muir with geological instruments.²⁷² President William Howard Taft sent a memorandum to diplomats and consular officers worldwide in 1911 to offer Muir assistance on his global botanical journey.²⁷³ Carr was a prolific author, with published literature covering a variety of topics: theology, botany, education, and religion.²⁷⁴ Ezra and Jeanne Carr were engaged in providing practical, yet thoughtful education for the working class; Jeanne especially fought for female literacy and vocational education.²⁷⁵

John Muir studied under Ezra Carr in his second year at the University of Wisconsin.²⁷⁶ Ezra believed that education should remain relevant to "the needs of the farmer, mechanic, and manufacturer," and spending equal time on science, rhetoric, and mathematics, "while observing the plan and purposes of God as expressed in the natural world."²⁷⁷ Ezra worried that "our learned institutions are losing their hold upon the popular mind."²⁷⁸ This approach, Ezra believed, would draw people to the ideals of democracy and economic development. Ezra is quoted in Muir's college notes, "Principles of Physics and Natural Philosophy," as saying,

²⁷² John Muir, Letter to Jeanne Carr from Yosemite, September 8, 1871, *Kindred & Related Spirits*, 148.

²⁷³ Michael P. Branch, *John Muir's Last Journey South to the Amazon and East to Africa: Unpublished Journals and Selected Correspondence* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2001), 73.

²⁷⁴ A list of Carr's writings may be found in the bibliography of Bonnie Johanna Gisel, *Kindred & Related Spirits: The Letters of John Muir and Jeanne C. Carr* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001), 358-340.

²⁷⁵ Gisel, *Kindred & Related Spirits*, 129; Gill Cockram, *Ruskin and Social Reform, Ethics and Economics in the Victorian Age* (London: Tauris, 2007), 22.

²⁷⁶ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 76.

²⁷⁷ Ezra Carr quoted in Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 76. Ezra found himself opposed by fellow professors and administrators alike, who balked at his ideas about the relevance of education. Science was garnering the prestige of the humanities slowly with older faculty.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

“Nature [is the] name for an effect whose cause is God.”²⁷⁹ The Carrs mixed the gentility of the humanities in the United States college education with liberal theology and natural sciences. Like Muir’s other university influence, professor of Greek James Davie Butler, the Carrs balked at specialization and instead favored boundless areas of research.²⁸⁰ Muir followed suit.

Muir’s intellectual gifts were such that the university passed him through college preparatory courses directly into freshman status, where he could be challenged at his intellectual level; Muir would continue, however, to “tinker” and receive jobs for his ingenuity as an inventor. Muir’s intellectual and inventive gifts benefited one another throughout his life. The children of the Carrs and James D. Butler brought John closer to the network of university faculty, with whom he later developed close friendships. Jeanne Carr in particular had a passion for botany, something that had a profound influence on Muir. Butler encouraged Muir to make a habit of journaling, which he molded around his botanical work; Butler’s enthusiasm for Ralph Waldo Emerson greatly influenced an impressionable young Muir. Emerson served as an example par excellence for journaling. Once again, home libraries, especially those of the Carrs, proved impactful during Muir’s collegiate years. Muir spent only five semesters at the University of Wisconsin; however, the university later offered him “matriculation as a free student.” Although he did not return in the fall of 1864, Muir continued to study independently and embarked on several official Alaska expeditions (in 1879, 1880, and 1890), such as those he documented in *The Cruise of the Corwin* and *Travels in Alaska*.²⁸¹ The Civil War served in part to sever Muir from the university, which, among the ranks of the student body and faculty, had

²⁷⁹ Ezra Carr quoted in Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 77.

²⁸⁰ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 80.

²⁸¹ John Muir, *The Cruise of the Corwin: Journal of the Arctic Expedition of 1881 in Search of DeLong and the Jeanette* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1917); *Travels in Alaska* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915).

been torn and divided by the ravages of war.²⁸² Muir would write his friends, the Galloways, in a letter dated 1862, “How strange that a country with so many schools and churches should be desolated by so unsightly a monster,” what Muir called “our war-demon.”²⁸³ Contemplating medical school in Michigan, Muir retreated from those plans for fear of the draft and an uncertainty about what he wanted his future to be, according to historian Donald Worster.²⁸⁴ Muir left the University of Wisconsin for “the University of the Wilderness” to botanize, but he continued to tinker, read literary giants, and write.²⁸⁵ Jeanne Carr encouraged Muir all the while to publish his experiences of studying the Sierras and traveling throughout the American continent as well as internationally; she introduced him to a vast intellectual network, while serving as his editorial advisor.

The immense correspondence between John Muir and Jeanne Carr served to influence both of them with information “from the field” as well as a large number of shared, suggested, and quoted readings from their favorite poets, theologians, and adventurers; the correspondence also served to set up meetings between Carr’s friends and Muir. Numerous letters from Muir written to Jeanne Carr were published in journals and newspapers; these letters served to broadcast Muir’s eloquent poetics to larger publics, from San Francisco to Chicago to the greater Boston area.²⁸⁶ Muir also had an immense impact on intellectuals and influential individuals on the West coast. For example, environmentalist John Burroughs claimed that “[n]o one could thoroughly know John Muir, or feel his power... until they met him.”²⁸⁷ Muir capitalized upon his influential friends and acquaintances in conjunction with his public discourse (public talks,

²⁸² Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 86.

²⁸³ Muir quoted in Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 86.

²⁸⁴ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 88.

²⁸⁵ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 90.

²⁸⁶ Ronald Eber, “John Muir and the Pioneer Conservationists of the Pacific Northwest,” in *John Muir in Historical Perspective*, ed. Sally M. Miller (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 184-202.

²⁸⁷ Quoted in Eber, “John Muir and the Pioneer Conservationists of the Pacific Northwest,” 186.

journals, and books) to create his image. President Theodore Roosevelt praised Muir's ability to eloquently communicate, stating that he "talked even better than he wrote" and that Muir had the greatest impact with the people with whom he had direct contact.²⁸⁸

Historian Ronald Eber has claimed that Muir gave a "national voice" to the many conservationists who shared his vision of the sacred American wilderness.²⁸⁹ Many of these activists and intellectuals were the most prolific conservationists of American wilderness on the West coast from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, such as Pacific Northwest political and industrial icons Seattle shipbuilder Robert Moran, politician and judge John Waldo, Portland developer Lester Lealand Hawkins, conservationist and Crater Lake National Park Superintendent William Gladstone Steel, mountaineer Philemon Beecher Van Trump, and University of Washington professor and president of The Mountaineers, a Washington mountaineering club, Edmund S. Meany. Eber's study of Muir's social networks reveals that he was the mouthpiece for a movement whose members received a much lesser share of the credit for their activism than did Muir.²⁹⁰ Muir's fame as a geologist, author, and naturalist, combined with his mobility and renown for living in the wild, made him the itinerant philosopher of American wilderness who could rhetorically and physically travel from audience to audience. Roosevelt's praise for Muir's oratory ability was noted by the many folks who attended his lectures.²⁹¹ General Otis Oliver Howard, notable for capturing Chief Joseph and the Nez Percé Indians in the Montana Territory in 1877, wrote to *The Oregonian* newspaper in 1880, praising the man whom he had met with great delight; Howard was struck by Muir's narratives of nature,

²⁸⁸ Theodore Roosevelt, quoted in Eber, "John Muir and the Pioneer Conservationists of the Pacific Northwest," 186.

²⁸⁹ Eber, "John Muir and the Pioneer Conservationists of the Pacific Northwest," 186.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Eber, "John Muir and the Pioneer Conservationists of the Pacific Northwest," 188.

creation, and “the work of the infinite” that he delivered “without scientific jargon.”²⁹² The two men held “a long interesting talk,” in Muir’s words in an 1898 letter to Jeanne Carr, about their own experiences in Alaska.²⁹³

A Swell of Influence: Transatlantic Debates and Genteel Cultural Capital

Both the Carrs and Muir read the work of the English Victorian-era philosopher and art critic John Ruskin. Muir believed that Ruskin’s philosophy of nature was far too dualistic and conventional; he described it as the “ropes and chains manufactured in the mills and forges of conventions.”²⁹⁴ Both Muir and Ruskin believed that pollution and environmental degradation resulted from moral failure, but Ruskin socialized (externalized) sin, whereas Muir individualized (internalized) it. As historian Terry Gifford argues, Ruskin actually upheld an internal harmony of nature, the idea that all of nature works together for a greater purpose.²⁹⁵ If Muir was not a sufficiently close reader of Ruskin, as historians Bonnie Gisell and Terry Gifford have argued, Ruskin’s Romantic, advocate style and themes still influenced Muir’s own.²⁹⁶ Muir’s discussions concerning John Ruskin are evidence of Muir’s tendency to engage in transatlantic debates on social justice, ethics, aesthetics, and other reflections of transatlantic circles of progressive groups. Historian Terry Gifford states that Ruskin said “environmental pollution was a product of moral pollution.”²⁹⁷ Gifford argues convincingly that Ruskin had tendencies towards describing dualism as “leaning towards vice and ugliness” in his critique of

²⁹² Eber, “John Muir and the Pioneer Conservationists of the Pacific Northwest,” 188, 206-207.

²⁹³ Eber, “John Muir and the Pioneer Conservationists of the Pacific Northwest,” 207.

²⁹⁴ Muir, quoted in Terry Gifford, “Muir’s Ruskin: John Muir’s Reservations about Ruskin Reviewed,” in *John Muir in Historical Perspective*, ed. Sally M. Miller, 137-138.

²⁹⁵ Gifford, “Muir’s Ruskin: John Muir’s Reservations about Ruskin Reviewed,” 140-141.

²⁹⁶ Gisell, *Kindred & Related Spirits*, 205; Terry Gifford, “Muir’s Ruskin: John Muir’s Reservations about Ruskin Reviewed,” in *John Muir in Historical Perspective*, ed. Sally M. Miller, 137-150.

²⁹⁷ Gifford, “Muir’s Ruskin: John Muir’s Reservations about Ruskin Reviewed,” 138.

nature art.²⁹⁸ Like Muir, Ruskin was well read in diverse thought, which, as historian Gill Cockram stated, “gave him the lateral flexibility of thought and interpretation, which people call visionary.”²⁹⁹ Like Ruskin, Muir was involved in creating conceptions of the world and of human/human and human/nonhuman relations. Muir challenged the anthropocentrism of industrial capitalism, which he placed in conversation with his Christian heritage. Muir referred to “man” (probably the gendered human) as the “unsatisfiable enemy of enemies.”³⁰⁰ Muir asked, “Why should man value himself as more than a small part of one great unit of creation? And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit—the cosmos? The Universe would be complete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge.”³⁰¹ Ruskin, however, spent more time worrying about workers’ wellbeing than Muir did, revealing a gap in Muir’s attention that would haunt the American preservation initiatives and projects for generations.³⁰² As Dorceta Taylor’s work has shown, American wilderness preservation attuned in different ways and different degrees based on class and race groupings.³⁰³ Ruskin resisted the individual “self-culture” of the American genteel class for the harmonious, almost socialist ethos of brotherhood.³⁰⁴ Muir’s critique of Ruskin, solid or not, challenged an authority and expressed an ideology of aesthetic epistemology, a logic of truth in beauty and art, that attempted to elevate American landscapes (and Muir’s own status to that

²⁹⁸ Quoted in Gifford, “Muir’s Ruskin: John Muir’s Reservations about Ruskin Reviewed,” 140.

²⁹⁹ Gill Cockram, *Ruskin and Social Reform, Ethics and Economics in the Victorian Age* (London: Tauris, 2007), 22.

³⁰⁰ John Muir, quoted in Lisa Mighetto, *Muir Among the Animals: The Wildlife Writings of John Muir* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986), 18.

³⁰¹ John Muir, *The Wilderness World of John Muir: A Selection from his Collected Work*, ed. Edwin Way Teale (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 317.

³⁰² Cockram, *Ruskin and Social Reform*, 198.

³⁰³ Dorceta Taylor, *The Environment and the People, 1600s-1900s: Disorder, Inequality, and Social Change* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

of Ruskin's) as superior to other sources of truth. The holder of perceived truth is the holder of power; this concept was the elevation, also, of the Scottish Common Sense notion of innate perception ability (of truth and beauty). Muir's word, however, was as important in the cultural landscape of American intellectual discourse as Ruskin's had been in the Victorian transatlantic cultural debates.

Muir, Religious Identification, and the Potential Capital of Christian Discourse

Muir's ability to captivate his audiences was the result of his oratorical prowess and literary acumen. Muir's use of religious language was copious and his knowledge of biblical, theological, and aesthetic literatures was overwhelming. This religious expertise was a primary element in his rise and influence as a public intellectual. Muir masterfully crafted his wilderness writings and scientific observations so that theists from a number of persuasions found Muir to represent their environmental proclivities. Such cultural competency was an asset or, put another way: capital. Holding cultural capital in the form of knowledge and rhetoric in a religious discourse, Muir held great potential to act as an authority to gain the attention, at the very least, of his audience.

Determining the authenticity, or sincerity, of Muir's religious language—that he “really meant” what he wrote about God and nature, for example—is not possible for the critical analyst. Attempting to do so overlooks the effectiveness of religious discourse in relation to the (Gramscian) common sense of society (that is, the concepts and practices that are taken-for-granted in society). We may conjecture about Muir's religion and the nature of religion in general; however, the purpose of this thesis is not to determine his “true” religious identity, but to examine how Muir's religious discourse shaped national myths and how his ability to

negotiate the field of nineteenth-century American religious discourse provided the agency, the cultural capital for him to contribute to such myth-making work.

The religious identities that scholars give historical figures have direct implications for the histories that we create. The history of Muir scholarship reflects the projects and proclivities of Muir's biographers. Literary scholar Jeffrey Bilbro argued that historians Steven Fox and Michael P. Cohen created a "de-Christianized version of John Muir that fit the Eastern ethos of the growing movement" of environmentalism.³⁰⁵ Prominent in the study of religion and nature, Max Oelschlaeger argued that Muir's religion was an "evolutionary pantheism," and Catherine L. Albanese and Bron Taylor shaped the debate by pushing the term "nature religion," with Taylor emphasizing what he argued was Muir's animism and pantheism with a Christian rhetorical façade.³⁰⁶ Raymond Barnett claimed that Muir was an "accidental Taoist."³⁰⁷

A person's religious identity may be thought of as their positionality, their position in relation to social conditions. Muir's positionality gives us clues to the potential contours of his thought and agency. Environmental historian Adam Sowards rightly argued that strong boundary marking of a singular religious identity for Muir "obscures his complexity and perhaps distorts the real contribution he made with his unique spiritual environmentalism."³⁰⁸ Although I agree that Muir's ideas about religion were complex, I am skeptical of Sowards's narrow view of Christianity, which idealizes Christianity as something other than amicable to utilitarianism. He

³⁰⁵ Jeffrey Bilbro, "'Preserving God's Wilderness' for Redemptive Baptism," *Christianity and Literature* 61, 4 (Summer 2012): 589.

³⁰⁶ Max Oelschlaeger, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1991), 173; Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 62.

³⁰⁷ Raymond Barnett, *Earth Wisdom: John Muir, Accidental Taoist, Charts Humanity's Only Future on a Changing Planet* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2016).

³⁰⁸ Adam M. Sowards, "Spiritual Egalitarianism: John Muir's Religious Environmentalism," in *John Muir in Historical Perspective*, ed. Sally S. Miller (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 124.

rightly noted that Dennis Williams and Donald Worster situated Muir well within nineteenth-century Protestantism, as they are two of a number of scholars who have argued for a re-assessment of the Protestantism in Muir's religious identity.³⁰⁹ Sowards argued, however, that Muir rejected utilitarianism, which, as environmental historian Mark Stoll points out, scholars have often equated with American Protestantism, and that Muir saw God spreading "his" love on all his creations.³¹⁰ Muir's concern for animal well-being pulls Muir away from Sowards's implicit theory of Christianity. And yet, Sowards's emphasis on Muir's human/nonhuman egalitarian reading overlooks Muir's rhetoric of the utility of *some* animals over others: "The American bison is extinct, but the timber wealth of our coast ought to be more sacred than the wild cattle on the hoof."³¹¹ Moreover, Sowards, like many others, failed to observe Muir's affinity for the Swedish Lutheran Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), who developed an extensive theo-philosophy for understanding the harmony of the material and spiritual realms.³¹² Sowards rightly noted that Muir fit within Transcendentalist and Romantic frames of discourse.³¹³ However, his egalitarian assessment is far too depoliticized for understanding Muir and his settler colonial context, which is to say Muir's positionality as a traveler contributing to the place-making of United States territories over indigenous lands. Muir, as a Scottish-born, naturalized citizen, benefited from his ability to navigate the United States' racial politics of belonging such that he could operate as an agent of empire (working for nation-building

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Sowards, "Spiritual Egalitarianism: John Muir's Religious Environmentalism," 125. This gendering is Sowards's interpretation of Muir's God, which fits Muir's common masculine descriptions for God; Mark Stoll, *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 35-36.

³¹¹ John Muir, "A Word Fitly Spoken," *Oregonian*, June 1, 1899. Quoted in Ronald Eber, "John Muir and the Pioneer Conservationist of the Pacific Northwest," in *John Muir in Historical Perspective* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), 198.

³¹² David Duner, *The Natural Philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg: A Study of the Conceptual Metaphors of the Mechanistic World-View* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013).

³¹³ Sowards, "Spiritual Egalitarianism: John Muir's Religious Environmentalism," 124.

initiatives). Muir benefited from his status as a white, educated male citizen with class privilege. Muir contributed to Victorian-era Americans' imagination that American wilderness spaces were uninhabited by humans by downplaying, ignoring, or being unaware of the role of dispossessed indigenous space. When he does mention indigenous presence, it usually reinforces his narrative of wilderness and his critique of anthropocentrism. Muir's settler colonial positionality is worth reading into his works and their later use by others (and the lack of use in particular sources).

Caution should be taken when considering Muir's religious discourse and its relationship to nature discourse. A scholarly concept of "nature religion" assumes much about the concept of "nature" as a transferable cross-cultural category and does little to reveal local conceptualizations. For instance, Albanese's homology (logic of sameness) of "nature religion," created by analyzing "religions" that centralize "natural" objects for the sake of "organizing reality," only makes sense if one delineates between *natural* and *non-natural* objects.³¹⁴ Moreover, valuation of "natural objects" (objects considered to be *of nature*, not technology or human design) as "orienting" can be stretched out and interpreted in a multitude of ways. The history of resource extraction—such as the California Gold Rush, which in the first two years killed two-thirds of the one-hundred thousand Native Americans in California when the Gold Rush began in 1849—well illustrates that conflict over "natural objects," such as gold, reveals a myriad of perspectives and consequences for defining nature as well as the plurality of rhetorical approaches to human needs.³¹⁵ While settlers enjoyed the canyon walls of the Sierras, many plundered the depths with mines and felled ancient trees for timber. Muir, decrying the sins of the logging industry, like many environmentalists continued to traffic in "natural objects,"

³¹⁴ Albanese, *Nature Religion in America*, 6.

³¹⁵ Theodore Catton, *American Indian and National Forests* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), Kindle edition location 2650-2663.

turning them into resources through agriculture and mining. One could both preserve Sublime spaces and extract magnificent profits (or otherwise benefit) from them. Though it might be tempting to think that Native Americans (and the average settler society citizen) and Muir had a common enemy in commercial resource extraction professionals, Muir's religious rhetoric represented the sentiments of a privileged class of genteel Americans purporting to include all Americans. For instance, Muir expressed a universal need for experiencing wilderness landscapes when in 1901 he stated,

The wonderful advance made in the last few years, in creating four national parks in the West, and thirty forest reservations, embracing nearly forty million acres; and in the planting of the borders of streets and highways and spacious parks in all the great cities, to satisfy the natural taste and hunger for landscape beauty and righteousness that God has put, in some measure, into every human being and animal, shows the trend of awakening public opinion.³¹⁶

Muir painted America as akin to "heaven": "No place is too good for good men, and still there is room. They are invited to heaven and may well be allowed in America."³¹⁷ However, he neglected to recognize that "natural spaces" were not always "spiritual" places of rest and relaxation for some, such as African Americans; they were, as Carolyn Finney argues, often spaces of fear, where memories and threats of disappearance and lynching were (and are) very real.³¹⁸ Muir envisioned the presentation of landscapes as a divine performance framed by nationalism, the qualities of God displayed in sublime beauty.³¹⁹ He asserted that "the United States government has always been proud of the welcome it has extended to good men of every nation, seeking freedom and homes and bread. Let them be welcomed still as nature welcomes them, to the woods as well as to the prairies and plains." Yet such sentiments seem oblivious to

³¹⁶ John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 362.

³¹⁷ John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 363.

³¹⁸ Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces*, 117.

³¹⁹ Sally Ann Ness, *Choreographies of Landscape: Signs of Performance in Yosemite* (New York: Berghahn, 2016). This concept has been explored by Ness through the Yosemite National Park cultural production.

the suffering of indigenous peoples cast out of United States territories and to the slaves who built the economy that brought on the Civil War.³²⁰ Alongside the potentialities and actualities of Muir's environmental rhetoric, including the preservation of millions of acres of land, there exists a social component that carries class, race, and colonial politics.

The Inosculation of Religion and Science in Victorian America

Later debates culminating in the 1925 Scopes Trial over the role of evolutionary science in public education obfuscate earlier concomitant developments within natural theology, evolutionary science, and anthropology (including the academic and public understanding of "religion"). Muir's life saw a flurry of discursive activity debating the nature of the human being. Racial science developed alongside botany, zoology, and a myriad of natural histories. Christian theological discourse, the dominantly held religious view of the Euro-American world, was not always at odds with evolutionary science. In fact, numerous imperial, colonial, and religious thinkers employed evolution to demonstrate that certain "races" were naturally subject to Euro-American civilization. Muir's "mystical" literary and rhetorical style attracted the likes of the "American school" of evolutionary scientists, such as Asa Gray and (anti-Darwinist) Louis Agassiz.³²¹ More recent reflections on Muir and religion critique ahistorical assessments of Muir (e.g., Cohen) in the context of Victorian-era Protestantism and post-Darwinian reflections from "believing scientists," or scientists who believed in God (and, usually, Jesus as God). Jeffrey Bilbro and Dennis Williams pointedly argue for placing Muir well within the territory of

³²⁰ John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 363.

³²¹ B. Ricardo Brown, *Until Darwin, Science, Human Variety and the Origins of Race* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 59.

nineteenth-century Protestant Christian traditions.³²² Williams framed Muir as a “mystical” Christian, as did Steven Hatch.³²³ Robert Engberg and Donald Wesling argued for Muir’s “personal [religious] experience” and the development of “ecstatic science and ecstatic writing.”³²⁴ Religion and philosophy scholar Evan Berry rightly noted that Muir’s writings are “asystematic.” Berry contrasts Muir with systematic theologies. Berry forcefully counters the position of environmental historian Donald Worster and his contention that Muir was cutting away from “the old Christian theology” of the United States.³²⁵ The racial dynamics of evolutionary discourse, even in Muir’s writings, are lost in the foggy mystification of Muir’s eloquence.³²⁶ Moreover, the lines between different Christian movements or identities and acceptance of a number of scientific discourses are less strict than simplistic notions would allow.

Considering the social and theological background of Muir’s adult life, such as the impact of Emanuel Swedenborg on Muir and his friends, reveals some of the complexity of Christian discourse in Victorian-era America and on Muir. Albanese has demonstrated that “metaphysical religion,” not wholly separate from Protestant Christianity, was present since the

³²² Jeffrey Bilbro, *Loving God’s Wilderness: The Christian Roots of Ecological Ethics in American Literature* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015). See especially Chapter 3, “Preserving God’s Wilderness for Redemption: Muir and Disciples of Christ Theology.” This is an expansion and reprint of an earlier article: Jeffrey Bilbro, “‘Preserving God’s Wilderness’ for Redemptive Baptism,” *Christianity and Literature* 61, 4 (Summer 2012): 587-622. See also Dennis Williams, *God’s Wilds: John Muir’s Vision of Nature* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).

³²³ Steven Hatch, *The Contemplative John Muir: Spiritual Quotations from the Great American Environmentalist* (self-published, 2012). I am indebted to Steven Hatch, Jeffrey Bilbro, and Dennis Williams for conversations that have shaped my thinking in this area. They have different methodological and personal commitments, but their individual contributions to Muir scholarship are noteworthy. Hatch’s book’s first edition misses key citations, but it provides important quotations for an introduction to Muir’s rhetoric.

³²⁴ Robert Engberg and Donald Wesling, *To Yosemite and Beyond: Writings From the Years 1863 to 1875* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), 21.

³²⁵ Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 79.

³²⁶ B. Ricardo Brown, *Until Darwin, Science, Human Variety and the Origins of Race* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010).

founding of the American republic.³²⁷ Two important lessons are grounded here. The first is that a lack in recognition of what Albanese calls metaphysical religion exists. Albanese frames *metaphysical religion* with four criteria: a fascination with the mind; an “ancient cosmological theory of the correspondence between worlds”; a focus on movement and energy; and “salvation understood as solace, comfort, therapy, and healing.”³²⁸ Second, there must be a stronger recognition among scholars of the lack of objective criteria for determining belonging in a certain religion, indeed for the construction of certain religions in general. Given the lack of sustained scholarly attention to the potentialities of influence on Muir’s religious thinking, critical-contextual analysis must more fully explore the role of less hegemonic Christian denominations to give a more robust picture of the effects of those ideologies on environmentalism and nationalism. For example, Muir engaged in an argument of authenticity (authentic experience of the Divine, authentic Nature, authentic Christian duty), pressing against particular theologies that buttressed anthropocentrism, economic liberalism, and biblical literalism. In a letter to his friend Catherine Merrill in 1872 Muir argued against these things in response to Merrill’s attempts to counter Muir’s theological dispositions on anti-trinitarianism, anti-anthropocentrism, and anti-biblicism (though it should be noted that Muir held the Bible in high, authoritative regard, even if not in the sole, infallible fashion of “orthodox” Christianity).³²⁹

Jeffrey Bilbro’s work demonstrates the strong presence of Campbellite theology, derived from Muir’s father, in influencing John Muir’s thinking. This is evidenced in Muir’s affection for the Campbellite Thomas Dick’s *Christian Philosopher* despite his father Daniel’s objection.³³⁰

³²⁷ Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

³²⁸ Albanese, *A Republic of Spirit and Mind*, 13-14.

³²⁹ John Muir, “Letter to Catherine Merrill,” in *John Muir: His Life, Letters, and Other Writings*, 166-167.

³³⁰ Dennis Williams, *God’s Wilds*, 21.

Although Daniel was a follower of Alexander Campbell, his rejection of non-biblical literature, even that written by a Campbellite, is a lesson in folk and anti-essentialist approaches to the study of religion. That is to say that denominational affiliation or rejection cannot wholly determine one's proclivities or ideologies, hence the importance for a consideration of acts of identification, viewing identity as an active construction of the self or other. Evan Berry expands on Bilbro's and Williams's work to demonstrate that Muir was in Protestant company, such as scientist Asa Gray, Theodore Roosevelt, and conservationist John Burroughs. Historian Mark Stoll argues that the broad spectrum of "Calvinist" traditions, theologians, and literature has produced a number of environmental authorities, including Muir.³³¹

Muir's intellectual development and affinity for Christian theology was clear in his recollections in *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*.³³² Having been caught with Thomas Dick's *Christian Philosopher*, lent to him by a neighbor, John was scolded by his father with "a [Bible] verse which spoke of 'philosophy falsely so-called.'"³³³ John mentioned that his father was easily convinced to purchase Josephus's *Wars of the Jews* and D'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation*, yet Daniel rejected the "pagan" Plutarch's *Lives*, until, that is, the popular vegetarian "graham bread and anti-flesh doctrine came suddenly into our backwoods neighborhood."³³⁴ Daniel only saw books as acceptable when they fit his narrow theological affinities. John Muir was convinced of a more expansive value of the literature. Indeed, Thomas Dick's work effectively gave apologia for the position that "nature" and "revelation" are not at odds with one another; rather, they are harmonious with one another, giving John the authority of a well-respected Christian theologian's opinion. Muir himself used Christian discourse *glaringly* throughout his

³³¹ Mark Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain*, Chapter 1, "Calvinism and Nature: Environmentalism's Founding."

³³² Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, 242-244.

³³³ This is likely Colossians 2:8.

³³⁴ Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, 241.

writing to argue for environmental politics, however Romantic and colonial those politics tended to be. He wrote in *Our National Parks*, “After hymns, prayers, and sermon [bird-hunters] go home to feast, to put God’s song birds to use, put them in their dinners instead of in their hearts, eat them, and suck the pitiful little drumsticks. It is only race living on race, to be sure, but Christians singing Divine Love need not be driven to such straits while wheat and apples grow and the shops are full of dead cattle. Song birds for food!”³³⁵ Muir’s use of Christian language to shame bird hunters follows the development during the Victorian era of what historian Lisa Mighetto argued was an increasing understanding of pain and animal life.³³⁶

What separated Muir from the general Calvinist movement (which is a problematically broad category when it assumes some concrete entity) was his de-emphasis on personal sin and a distinctly separate heavenly realm and his rejection of “orthodoxy.” Instead, following the genteel “Moderate” Calvinist tradition, Muir shared his sentiments with a Scottish rhetorical style that subjugated formal logic for ethical appeal and Christian ethos.³³⁷ Muir did, however, retain aspects of Calvinist discourse in his philosophy. One can find in Muir’s famous *Our National Parks* important nodes of Scottish Calvinist discourse, such as predestination, weaved into his rhetoric:

But glaciers, back in their cold solitudes, work independently from men, exerting their tremendous energies in silence and darkness. Coming in vapor from the sea, flying invisible on the wind, descending in snow, changing to ice, white, spirit-like, they brood out spread over the predestined landscapes, working on unwearied through unmeasured ages, until in the fullness of time the mountains and valleys are brought forth, channels furrowed for the rivers, basins made for meadows and lakes, and soil beds spread for the forests and fields that man and beast may be fed. Then vanishing like clouds, they melt into streams and go singing back home to the sea. To an observer upon this adamantine

³³⁵ John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 238.

³³⁶ Lisa Mighetto, *Muir Among the Animals: The Wildlife Writings of John Muir* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986), xiii.

³³⁷ The Scottish forms of Calvinism, especially those that shaped Muir and his family, held contours that often go unrepresented. See, Andrew T. N. Muirhead, *Reformation, Dissent, and Diversity: The History of Scotland’s Churches, 1560-1960* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 27.

old monument in the midst of such scenery, getting glimpses of the thoughts of God, the day seems endless, the sun stands still.³³⁸

Muir crossed the concept of Calvinist predestination (“predestined landscapes”) with the determinism of the material processes of natural history. Although Muir rejected biblical literalism, that rejection did not negate his reliance on biblical texts for his environmental rhetoric, relying on conditioned responses caused by the hegemony of popular religious language without having to make confessional statements: “Much faithless fuss is made over the passage in the Bible telling of the standing still of the sun for Joshua. Here you may learn that the miracle occurs for every devout mountaineer, for everybody doing anything worth doing, seeing anything worth seeing. One day is as a thousand years, a thousand years as one day, and while yet in the flesh you enjoy immortality.”³³⁹

Muir memorized much if not all of the Bible. Samuel Hall Young, a missionary who accompanied Muir on his Alaska expedition, wrote, “We both loved the same poets and could repeat, verse about, many poems of Tennyson, Keats, Shelley and Burns. He took with him a volume of Thoreau, and I one of Emerson, and we enjoyed them together. I had my printed Bible with me, and he had his in his head — the result of a Scotch father’s discipline. Our studies supplemented each other and our tastes were similar.”³⁴⁰

Samuel Hall Young’s account reveals that at least one Presbyterian clergyperson resonated with Muir. Studying Muir in the milieu of Victorian and transatlantic intellectual social networks reveals that some American Christians engaged a number of intellectual projects. The fluidity with which theological and biblical texts engaged with genteel literature (such as that of Emerson and Thoreau) paints a picture of the authority of these theological and biblical works in

³³⁸ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 62.

³³⁹ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 92-93. Muir references Joshua 10:12 and 2 Peter 3:8 here.

³⁴⁰ Samuel Hall Young, *Alaska Days with John Muir*, 67.

American genteel religious discourse. Literary scholar Tom Mole has shown that Romantic poets and novelists were frequently appropriated by ministers and discussed from the pulpit.³⁴¹ The fact that Muir was able to amass such an eclectic library is testament to his role as an intellectual, as well as the financial resources he had. When Muir lacked the finances, he relied on his ability to network (demonstrated by his Wisconsin library network or his circle of literary friends). Muir's penchant for consuming a broad range of literature included the works of British and European intellectuals like John Ruskin. Muir's personal library, held and digitally catalogued by the Holt-Atherton Special Collections at the University of the Pacific, provides a picture of his intellectual acumen and material resources.³⁴² This library holds works of literature in which Muir wrote extensive marginal notes, ranging across numerous genres and academic fields. Many of the works were provided to Muir by the authors themselves. Moreover, his connection to influential Scottish literature (e.g., the poetry of Robert Burns), which was also treasured by Americans born in the United States, as well as other British and European literature, suggests that Muir's well-read disposition provided an intellectual development that included Victorian-American and transatlantic conversations.

Richard White has argued that Muir "was not nearly as complicated a thinker about nature and society as Emerson or Thoreau," but his assessment remains embedded in a flat understanding of Muir.³⁴³ In fact, Muir's von Humboldtian, post-Darwinian, Romantic conceptualization of nature (in which an interconnected ecology of beings could experience God

³⁴¹ Tom Mole, *What Victorians Made of Romanticism: Material Artifacts, Cultural Practices, and Reception History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 100-116.

³⁴² This catalogue may be found here:

<http://www.pacific.edu/Documents/library/Special%20Collections%20Forms/Muir%20Library/Muir%20Library%20by%20Author.pdf>.

³⁴³ Richard White, "Transcendental Landscapes," in *American Victorians and Virgin Nature*, ed. T. J. Jackson Lears (Boston: Isabell Stewart Garden Museum, 2002), 7. White lauds Cohen for producing the "best analysis of Muir and his thinking" (15). However, as argued earlier in this thesis, over-reliance on Cohen's scholarship has misled a great deal of scholarship on Muir.

and God's revelation of history and theology through wilderness dwelling) was nuanced, complex, and at times paradoxical. This was possibly the result of Muir's habit of reading widely across numerous fields of inquiry and artistic writings. Emerson and Thoreau both influenced Muir. However, despite their giant stature in Victorian discourse, Emerson and Thoreau were by no means the only Victorian influences on Muir; understanding Emerson and Thoreau only teaches us so much about Muir's conception and articulation of the world.³⁴⁴ In fact, appeals to Emerson and Thoreau highlight later proclivities while obscuring the many authors that shaped Muir's thinking. The influence of Harvard scientist Asa Gray and Scottish geologist Charles Lyell, as well as the theological works of Emanuel Swedenborg have garnered less attention.³⁴⁵ Emerson's connection to Muir is a complex subject because it teaches us about the desires and nature philosophies of the two men when they met. Muir not only contributed to geological and botanical sciences, but he was well read in numerous scientific fields during his time. He garnered the respect of scientists such as Asa Gray and Joseph LeConte, America's then-preeminent biologist and geologist, respectively. Muir spoke of both men, as they spoke of him, with respect and genteel, theologically inflected language.³⁴⁶ Muir called LeConte and his brother a "blessed... [star] of purist light," always "overcoming evil with good" (a reference to Romans 12:21).³⁴⁷

Muir's Harvard connections helped build his renown. Recalling his meeting Emerson over a dinner at Harvard University during the conferment of his honorary M.A. degree in 1896,

³⁴⁴ This point may surely be debatable, but arguing for the primacy of the two writers overlooks a plethora of data and appears to rely more on their later popularity than on the influence of thinkers during and leading up to Muir's time.

³⁴⁵ It is often the case that their scientific work constitutes their impact on Muir. The religious impact is in need of further analysis.

³⁴⁶ John Muir, "Reminiscences of Joseph Le Conte," *The University of California Magazine*, 1901. v. 7 no. 5. Pp. 209-213.

³⁴⁷ Muir, "Reminiscences of Joseph Le Conte," 212-213; Joseph Le Conte, *The Autobiography of Joseph Le Conte* (D. Appleton and Company, 1903), 295.

Muir spoke of Emerson, Louis Agassiz, and Asa Gray as the “choicest of your Harvard’s men” and “the best of God’s nobles.”³⁴⁸ Muir’s Harvard-given honorary degree is evidence of his social standing and his genteel positionality, evinced by Emerson’s description of Harvard and of the Boston area associated with it: “Boston commands attention as the town which was appointed in the destiny of nations to lead the civilization of North America.”³⁴⁹ Recognition for intellectual and artistic talents within the Boston community provided social and cultural capital for social agency and cultural production. Muir shared a good portion of the genteel habitus through his intellectual, literary, and social preparations, but, as Broaddus argues, we should look for the individual responses to distinct projects within this habitus.³⁵⁰ Although Muir shared a significant number of social dispositions with Emerson (such as literary tastes, scientific interests, and fascination with the “noble savage”), Muir found greater tolerance for living outdoors, giving him more allure as a prophet-type of public figure who exemplified the masculine ideal of enjoying the luxurious freedom to struggle with the forces of nature, while quoting the authorities of genteel culture.³⁵¹ Emerson was enamored with Muir, even offering him a professorship at Harvard. Muir represented the intellectual and cultural capital-holder of the Boston Brahmin, yet he performed *fascino-prestigio* in his extreme outdoor adventuring as the presence of genteel intellectual refinement shaping the mythological (and the mythology of the) frontier.

³⁴⁸ Quoted by Badé in, “Yosemite, Emerson, and the Sequoias,” in *John Muir: His Life, Letters, and Other Writings*, 131.

³⁴⁹ Quoted in Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 10.

³⁵⁰ Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 12.

³⁵¹ Muir recognized that Emerson was in the “afternoon of his life.” He was not criticizing Emerson’s commitment to and philosophy of wilderness enjoyment. Quoted by Badé in “Yosemite, Emerson, and the Sequoias,” in *John Muir: His Life, Letters, and Other Writings*, 133.

Muir and the Swedenborg Network

The relationship among Emanuel Swedenborg, John Muir, and environmentalism has been understudied. Historian Donald Worster, Muir's most recent and most detailed biographer, does not mention Swedenborg, even when writing about the Swedenborgian William Keith, whom he calls "one of Muir's closest friends."³⁵² As Devin Zuber has noted, Muir's social network was filled with followers of Swedenborg (e.g., William Keith, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Jeanne Carr, and Gifford Pinchot), and he read the philosophical works of Swedenborg and his followers (e.g., Sampson Reed, James John Garth Wilkinson, and Henry David Thoreau). Emerson sent Muir a copy of Reed's *Observations on the Growth of the Mind*, which Muir, Emerson, and Jeanne Carr later discussed in detail throughout their friendship.³⁵³ Landscape artist William Keith successfully pushed Muir to attend the Swedenborg church in San Francisco, California, established by Joseph Worchester (teacher of the architect and urban designer, Daniel Burnham), who worked for Muir's Yosemite employer, James Mason Hutchings, who hired Muir to build and operate his sawmill; Hutchings daughter, Flo, was the first non-Indian to be born in the Yosemite Valley.³⁵⁴

Muir produced handwritten notes in a copy of his book *Stickeen*, describing his beloved dog as being "like Swedenborg a Herald of a New Gospel."³⁵⁵ Muir's anti-denominationalism should prevent scholars from drawing too hard a conclusion (such as that Muir left Christianity) about what he was claiming regarding his relationship to Swedenborgian or Christian identity.

³⁵² Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 183.

³⁵³ Gisel, *Kindred & Related Spirits*, 199. Also, Devin Zuber, "Heralds of a New Gospel: John Muir and the San Francisco Swedenborgians," unpublished manuscript, 4. In a conversation with Zuber about the underrepresentation of Swedenborgian influence on American environmentalism, Zuber sent unpublished manuscripts of his book chapters. I am indebted to Zuber for engaging in very helpful conversations about the role of Swedenborg and the San Francisco intellectual scene.

³⁵⁴ Zuber, "Heralds of a New Gospel: John Muir and the San Francisco Swedenborgians," 3. "Hutchings," NPS.org, (<https://www.nps.gov/yose/learn/historyculture/hutchings.htm>).

³⁵⁵ Zuber, "Heralds of a New Gospel: John Muir and the San Francisco Swedenborgians," 9.

What is important about Swedenborg is not solely his pluralist and so-called mystic, or metaphysical, theology and its effects on Muir, but also the social network that Swedenborg's followers crafted. Although Muir was critical of a shift in Keith's artistic style, which became more concerned with the emotions produced by his landscapes than fidelity to realism, Muir's own works were more like Keith's in that his was not merely a direct transmission of the landscape into words, but socially shaped productions.³⁵⁶ Muir's social circle valued Swedenborg in constructing its aesthetic and literary works. Swedenborg inspired Muir and other wilderness interpreters to see truth and love reflected in nature. Americans could consume reflections of the divine at a distant site through literature. The American "Sublime," or experience of awe, evoked an "outrage to our powers of perception" that popular intellectuals culturally produced for those not present to experience it.³⁵⁷ Muir admired Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had inherited the British Romantic version of the Sublime. Muir's claim that "imagination makes us infinite" did not spring from his creativity alone; it followed generations of Sublime thinking from Kant to Coleridge. Muir followed in the eloquent footsteps of his heroes:

How infinitely superior to our physical senses are those of the mind! The spiritual eye sees not only rivers of water but of air. It sees the crystals of the rock in rapid sympathetic motion, giving enthusiastic obedience to the sun's rays, then sinking back to rest in the night. The whole world is in motion to the center. So also sounds. We hear only woodpeckers and squirrels and the rush of turbulent streams. But imagination gives us the sweet music of tiniest insect wings, enables us to hear, all round the world, the vibration of every needle, the waving of every bole and branch, the sound of stars in circulation like particles in the blood. The Sierra canyons are full of avalanche debris — we hear them boom again, for we read past sounds from present conditions. Again, we hear the earthquake rock-falls. Imagination is usually regarded as a synonym for the

³⁵⁶ Zuber, "Heralds of a New Gospel: John Muir and the San Francisco Swedenborgians," 17. Zuber describes Keith as following the Swedenborgian landscape painter George Inness.

³⁵⁷ Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2006), Kindle edition Location 1653.

unreal. Yet is true imagination healthful and real, no more likely to mislead than the coarser senses. Indeed, the power of imagination makes us infinite.³⁵⁸

Beginning with the Hudson River School (approximately 1825), especially, American artists became involved in inscribing values and identity into American space.³⁵⁹ Muir wrote in *Picturesque California*, a book written to increase tourism on the American West coast, “But the darkest scriptures of the mountains are illumined with bright passages of Nature’s eternal love, and they never fail to manifest themselves when one is alone.” He continued, “All along your course thus far, excepting while crossing the cañons, the landscapes are open and expansive. On your left the purple plains of Mono repose dreamy and warm. On your right and in front, the near Alps spring keenly into the thin sky with more and more impressive sublimity.”³⁶⁰ Muir shared Swedenborg’s emphasis on light as theologically revealing. In a letter to Asa Gray Muir wrote,

The sun himself seemed to have reached a higher life as if he had died & only his soul were glowing with rayless bodiless Light, & as Christ to his disciples so this departing Sun-Soul said to every precious beast.-to every pine & weed, to every stream & mountain, My Peace I give unto you , I ran home in the moonlight with your sack of roses slung on my shoulder by a buckskin string, - Down through the junipers - down through [3]the firs - now in black shadow - now in white light, past great South Dome white as the moon - past Spirit like Nevada- past Pywiack - through the groves of Illilouette & spiry pines of the open Valley, Star- crystals sparking above - frost crystals beneath, & rays of spirit beaming everywhere. I reached home a trifle weary but could have wished so Godful a walk some miles & hours longer & as I slid your roses off my shoulder I said This is one of the big round ripe days that so fatten our lives - So much of sun on one side, So much of moon on the other.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ Linnie Marsh Wolfe records Muir saying this in a September 1, 1875, letter. Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1979), 226. Originally published in 1938 and reprinted in 1979, there is some suspicion that Wolfe’s publication is not wholly faithful to the original texts.

³⁵⁹ See Mark R. Stoll, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

³⁶⁰ John Muir, *Picturesque California: The Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Slope* (New York: J. Dewey Publishing Co., 1888), 11.

³⁶¹ John Muir, “Letter from John Muir to [Asa] Gray, 1872 Dec 18,” John Muir Papers, Muir-Hanna Trust University of the Pacific and Gray Herbarium Archives, Harvard University. (<https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/jmcl/18808/>).

Muir was fascinated by the theology and followers of Swedenborg; both of these provided Muir with the means to challenge orthodoxy, understood as the strict adherence to the Christian Scriptures taken literally, and to justify experiential theologizing (i.e., finding God in nature).³⁶² Muir actively engaged in popular spiritual movements of his day and at the end of his life he collected works on spiritualism and séances.³⁶³ Swedenborgian discourse emphasizes the spiritual and material realms as co-existing on earth. Heaven and hell, for Swedenborg, were states of mind, not distant realms for judgement. Zuber framed the influence of Swedenborg in Muir's thought: "'Here is heaven,' Muir wrote, perhaps not at all metaphorically, 'the dwelling place of angels.'" But "here" easily slips into a hell populated by the capitalist devils of development and progress; "the mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n," as Muir (and Swedenborg) both equivocally knew from their Milton.³⁶⁴ The mental hell Muir experienced, according to Zuber, was only exorcised by time spent in the wilderness with like-minded people.

Muir read Milton. Muir read Dante. Muir knew his Campbellite theology. Muir favored to speculate about the presence of God and heaven in things seen, as well as the hell of commercial destruction and greed. Swedenborg and his followers gave him the intellectual space to challenge Christian theological traditions. In a letter to Jeanne Carr Muir noted his appreciation for the "Hindu extracts" that she had provided him.³⁶⁵ The works of Swedenborg connected Eastern literati from Harvard with other culture-shaping universities. Moreover, the class dynamics and the habitus of certain ways of representing the world (e.g., genteel culture)

³⁶² I am aware that "literally" is problematic, as the "literal reading" of any given text, especially the Christian canon, is highly contested.

³⁶³ Fox, *American Conservatism*, 369; Zuber, "Heralds of a New Gospel: John Muir and the San Francisco Swedenborgians," 20.

³⁶⁴ Zuber, "Heralds of a New Gospel: John Muir and the San Francisco Swedenborgians," 23.

³⁶⁵ Gisel, *Kindred & Related Spirits*, 173.

were encapsulated in Muir's social network.³⁶⁶ Muir retained and used much of the Protestant culture that he learned growing up into the American West, which, as historian Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp has demonstrated, was both culturally and institutionally diverse concerning religious discourse, what Maffly-Kipp calls a "free market of religious beliefs."³⁶⁷

Muir's renown made him a sought-after teacher. Offers and calls for professorships at Harvard, MIT, and Yale challenge the notion that Muir was merely a "prophet" and rather demonstrate that he was revered as a Gramscian "organic intellectual"; he relied on institutional knowledge and scientific acumen and authority. Muir was eulogized by William E. Colby, an early Sierra Club officer, demonstrating how people viewed Muir's work: "His true position as a geologist will never be adequately recognized because his writings on his geological studies were so minimized [*sic*] by contrast with that greater field of beautiful literature in which he excelled." The "religious," or theological, knowledge construction that Muir underwent was not wholly separate from traditional sources; his university days were formative in his theological formation. When he wrote to his friend Robert Underwood Johnson in 1895, responding to questions about teaching offers, he said that one "Professor Runkle" asked him to come to the "Institute of Technology in Boston" (MIT), and that he "could have his choice of professorships there." Muir, recalling a conversation with Runkle—who spent time with in Yosemite—wrote, "[I] night and day preached to him the gospel of the glaciers." The same letter made note that, in a conversation with famed California physician and geologist Joseph Le Conte, Louis Agassiz stated warmly that Muir "knows all about [the geology of the Sierra]."³⁶⁸ Asa Gray, as well, bade

³⁶⁶ This is true even in architectural cultures in the United States. The connection between Swedenborg's aesthetic philosophy and theology and America's architectural culture, including the National Parks, is in need of further study.

³⁶⁷ Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, *Religion and Society in Frontier California* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 117.

³⁶⁸ John Muir, *John Muir: His Life, Letters, and Other Writings*, 321.

Muir come to Harvard—though it is not certain whether Muir was alluding to Gray’s offering of a professorship, as it appears that Muir denied it and later stated that he “never thought of leaving God’s big show [wilderness] for a mere professorship, call who may.”³⁶⁹ However, regardless of Muir rejecting these offers, this could-be professor’s rhetoric (environmental or otherwise) was all the more buttressed by his ethos as an intellectual, and especially as a scientist. Muir experienced renown among his social networks, which were comprised of university elites, social titans, and productive publishers.

It appears that Muir’s leaning towards non-Trinitarian theologies and philosophies such as Swedenborgianism and Unitarianism became the catalyst for scholars to claim that he merged away from “Christianity.”³⁷⁰ This position relies on an essentialist reading of Christianity that privileges Trinitarian, textual, and boundary-strict theologies. If we do not create criteria for belonging to Christianity, but rather look for a rhetoric of identification, a rhetoric of belonging, then a more historical and complex picture of Muir’s relationship to social movements unfolds. Muir rejected the necessity for dogmatic, strict rules and theologies. In a letter to his brother, David Gilrye Muir, he wrote,

I do not like the doctrine of close[d] communion as held by hard-shells, because the whole clumsy structure of the thing rests upon a foundation of course-grained dogmatism. Imperious, bolt-upright exclusiveness upon any subject is hateful, but it becomes absolutely hideous and impious in matters of religion, where all men are equally interested. I have no patience at all for the man who complacently wipes his pious lips and waves me away from a simple rite which commemorates the love and sacrifice of Christ.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ John Muir, *John Muir: His Life, Letters, and Other Writings*, 321.

³⁷⁰ Ronald Limbaugh, Jeffrey Bilbro, and Dennis Williams well document and counter these claims; Jeffrey Bilbro, “Preserving ‘God’s Wilderness’ for Redemptive Baptism,” *Christianity and Literature* 61, No 4 (Summer 2012): 591.

³⁷¹ John Muir, Letter to David Gilrye Muir, “Balmy Sabbath Morning in Yosemite, April 10th, 1870,” in *John Muir: His Life, Letters, and Other Writings*, 115-116.

Muir later argued that infant baptism was justified and, along with “religious training,” infant baptism was “likely to do very much good.”³⁷² He cared nothing for “how the scripture is interpreted” but believed that “it was a beautiful and impressive ordinance.”³⁷³ Muir expressed a paradigm for religion that favored liberal theology and Victorian sensibilities of the Sublime.

Muir and Swedenborg shared the cultural capital of scientific renown and an impressive acumen of letters. Boston, the city that gave birth to Transcendentalism and American Romanticism, was also the city that brought Swedenborg to American cultural production and philosophy.³⁷⁴ As Swedenborg scholar Anders Hallengren shows, after Emerson’s wife passed away he traveled to Europe, where he became immersed in Swedenborg’s writings, and partially as a result, natural science and philosophy; Emerson would later return to the United States and lecture on nature.³⁷⁵ When Emerson’s *Nature* (published anonymously) was received in England, Hallengren states, Swedenborgians thought that it was, in fact, a Swedenborg tract.³⁷⁶ Interpreting the nonhuman world through combinations of theology and science was something that Emerson and Muir shared. Muir was enamored of not only Swedenborg but also his second cousin Carl Linnaeus, whose “botanical mysticism” inspired Muir’s own works. Muir wrote,

A botanist may be a giant in intellect, gather plants from the four quarters of the globe and pile them in labeled heaps as high as haystacks, without kindling a single spark of the love that fired the followers of Linnaeus. In drying plants, botanists too often dry themselves. But Linnaeus loved every living thing as his friend and brother, and his eyes never closed on the divine beauty and harmony and oneness they displayed. All the dry word-work he did, however technical and severe, was done to bring the plants and animals as living children of Nature forward into light to be loved. In the midst of his immense classifying labors, he seemed always to be saying in a low glowing undertone,

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Anders Hallengren, *Gallery of Mirrors: Reflections of Swedenborgian Thought* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborgian Foundation Publishers, 1998), Kindle Edition, Location 1847.

³⁷⁵ Hallengren, *Gallery of Mirrors*, Location 1877-1890.

³⁷⁶ Hallengren, *Gallery of Mirrors*, Location 1922.

“Come, darlings: I love you, and want everybody to love you! Come, stand in rows and let me see you and count you and call you by name.”³⁷⁷

Mysticism, Empire, Capitalism

Muir’s affinity for Linnaeus and Swedenborg signaled his competence across religious and scientific discourses and his affinity for thinkers who marshalled science and mysticism into unified conceptions of truth. I am cautious using “mysticism,” as it lacks a strict definition. This is one weakness of the work of Muir scholar Dennis Williams. I use “mysticism” here to denote an emphasis on otherworldliness, communion with the divine, and ecstatic experience discourse, which commonly accompanies the signifier “mysticism.”³⁷⁸ Botanical versions of both religious and scientific discourses operated strongly in colonialist iterations of nationalist identity. Science historian Andrew J. Lewis has argued that since the days of the early American Republic, figures who found (or created) “objects of great value” (such as the Giant Sequoia) garnered local and national social capital; however, botanists fought the tensions that existed between local plant usage and knowledge and a “broadly, rapidly maturing capitalist economy.”³⁷⁹ While colonial assessments analyzed resources, they framed indigenous medicines as superstitions.³⁸⁰ Muir, following his genteel habitus, discursively created objects of importance, generating what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls *religious capital*: the resources at play in the *field* of religious

³⁷⁷ Lisbet Koerner, “Daedalus Hyperboreus: Baltic Natural History and Minerology in the Enlightenment,” in *The Sciences of European Enlightenment*, ed. William Clark, Jan Golinski, and Simon Schaffer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 396; John Muir, *Linnaeus (1707-1778)*

https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/people/linnaeus.aspx.

³⁷⁸ Dennis Williams, *God’s Wilds: John Muir’s Vision of Nature* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 29. A lack of strong division between “mystical” and “religious” experiences is problematic in mysticism discourse. There is a sense of heightened sensation, especially of a somatic nature, connected to an otherworldly reality. However, one might argue that most religious discourse has some element of this.

³⁷⁹ Andrew J. Lewis, “Gathering for the Republic,” in *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics on the Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 69.

³⁸⁰ Lewis, “Gathering for the Republic,” 72.

discourse.³⁸¹ These resources allowed Muir to speak authoritatively. For example, Muir used Linnaeus's namesake plant, *Linnaea*, to enchant both the plant and the space in which it resided: "Wherever *Linnaea* dwells, you will find enchanting woods and the dearest of the small plant-people - chiogenes, *Clintonia*, orchids, heathworts, and hosts of bright mosses wearing golden crowns. No breath of malaria comes near *Linnaea borealis*."³⁸² Muir recalled a botanical outing with Asa Gray and botanist Sir Joseph Hooker to find *Linnaea borealis*; Muir noted that Gray had "felt its presence," that is, the presence of "the blessed fellow" *Linnaea borealis*.³⁸³ Muir's poetics of botanical objects, and his fantastical stories of *finding* them, were not just narratives of botanical curiosities; rather, they constructed Muir's ethos as a holder of cultural, social, and religious capital. Muir turned an obscure flower into an object of value, an exotic find, generating narratives of mystical expedition, flowering his language beyond cold scientific and materialistic descriptions. One more illustration may illuminate Muir's rhetorical tactic of framing religious, or enchanted, if you will, religious capital:

The air and the scenery [around *Linnaea borealis*] are always good enough for gods or men, and a divine charm pervades it that no mortal can escape. In Linnaean woods I always feel willing to encamp forever and forego even heaven. Never was man's memory more blessedly embalmed than is the memory of immortal Linnaeus in this little flower. All around the cool ends of the world, while wild beauty endures, the devout pilgrim will see.³⁸⁴

Muir's eloquence was a performance of the expectations enculturated by the popularity of natural theology in the nineteenth century.³⁸⁵ Muir combined a eulogy, field notes, and mystic reflections on the *Linnaea borealis*, elevating its status and the fashion in which it was found, to

³⁸¹ Terry Rey, *Bourdieu on Religion: Imposing Faith and Legitimacy* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2013), 137. 51.

³⁸² John Muir, *Linnaeus (1707-1778)* https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/people/linnaeus.aspx (accessed June 13, 2018).

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid. Muir goes on to quote a poem: "/beneath dim aisles in odorous beds,/ The slight *Linnaea* hang its twin-born heads,/ And bless the monument of the man of flowers,/ Which breathes his sweet fame through the northern bowers."

³⁸⁵ Keeney, *Botanizers*, 103.

mythical status. If the discovery of facts, such as dimensions of mountains and glaciers and botanical classification and discovery gave the holder (creator) of this knowledge *some* form of capital, then where did that capital most significantly operate, and how did this knowledge contribute to the civic culture that was so important to the genteel class and its share of hegemony?³⁸⁶ The answer to this question is in the space of cultural production, the production of American identity and mythology. These in turn helped structure society.

Lewis further notes that classification, of which botanists were practitioners par excellence, was highly utilitarian.³⁸⁷ Systems of classification and their corresponding narratives helped orient their readers to the utility of objects. By mystifying, theologizing, and mythologizing plants (as in the cases of the *Linnaea borealis* and the Giant Sequoia discussed in chapter 3), Muir carried social, cultural, and religious capital, which allowed him to speak authoritatively as a scientist, author, and political actor. Since politician Humphrey Marshall (1722-1801), settler botanical knowledge received high regard, often in competition with indigenous botanical knowledge.³⁸⁸ Muir benefitted from this scientific knowledge and authority structure. Moreover, as evidenced by the works of former politician and naturalist Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827), citizens understood botanical knowledge as beneficial to national self-confidence and individual self-culture because it enriched their resources, beautified their land, and argued for cultural mastery over other cultures.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ “Holder” is merely a socio-identification. Constructor of knowledge reflects more accurate theories of knowledge construction. This is in line with Gramsci, Foucault, Ortner, Asad, and other theorists of power and religion. I will refer to “holders” with the assumption that that is an identification and with the assumption that “creator” will, even if not referred to as such, be implicit.

³⁸⁷ Lewis, “Gathering for the Republic,” 69-70.

³⁸⁸ Lewis, “Gathering for the Republic,” 70.

³⁸⁹ Lewis, “Gathering for the Republic,” 71. However, not all folks were as interested in national issues. Lewis argues that “ordinary citizens” were more interested in curiosities while more prominent citizens were invested in nation-building.

Muir's productivity as an author was situated in a time in which there was a call to "write America." William Ellery Channing, with whom Muir was familiar, argued that national literature had "intimate connections with our moral and religious, as well as public interest."³⁹⁰ Muir's language, as evidenced in the next chapter, demonstrates an agentic advantage for navigating national, moral, and religious territories of discourse that positioned Muir such that his effectiveness as a rhetor overshadowed strong consistency in his acts of identification.

John Muir was conditioned by the genteel class, which made use of his talents and interests to speak on their behalf and to ennoble and enchant the nation that they sought to shape. The American "high culture" production activity (literature, art, and music of the upper classes of society) corresponded with the advent of the National Parks and the wilderness advocacy of John Muir. This Scottish immigrant with a knack for "tinkering" and writing went where most did not dare. Muir traveled to and narrated the wonders of the world beyond urban industrial complexes. Muir represented the myth of freedom that defined the identity of an expanding empire. Civilization was not overcome by Muir's advocacy for wilderness, it was refined.

This chapter orients Muir's connections to the genteel class as a Gramscian intellectual who operated in the field of religious discourse. It was Muir's ability to speak in the fashion of the genteel class that helped him provide the narratives for the Romantic conception of nature that shaped a genteel ethical movement through religious rhetoric. Muir wove common theological and religious language into poetic narratives infused with national ethical reflections. He combined challenging anti-anthropocentric ethical discourse with common sense theological language, which was both orthodox and unorthodox, for American hegemony. Moreover, as genteel culture shaped Muir, his language mystified the nation-building efforts of an expanding

³⁹⁰ Broaddus, *Genteel Rhetoric*, 3.

empire and the structures that benefited the most from that expansion. Muir worked alongside Emerson, William Keith, and a number of popular scientists who were creating an American image. In its American iteration, environmentalism reflected the cultural proclivities of a genteel class pondering the ethics of an increasingly industrial nation. By dislocating Muir from any essentialist notions of religion, we can reimagine Muir as fluidly identifying, strategically operating for particular social projects. Muir's religious discourse, in its eloquence and fluidity, represented the proclivities of the educated, genteel culture, free to be revealed outside the boundaries of buildings and books.

The next chapter demonstrates that Muir was operating under settler (colonial) common sense while he was producing knowledge, mythology, and settler science. John Muir was a myth-maker for an expanding empire whose ethnic and racial colonial politics operated through his seemingly benign nature writings and correspondence.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT'S SO NATURAL ABOUT NATIONAL PARKS?: JOHN MUIR, MYTH-MAKING, AND THE COLONIAL COMMON SENSE OF AMERICA'S WILDERNESS PROPHET

Much has been said about what John Muir's religion was, overlooking the political function of Muir's religious descriptions of the American wilderness in his settler colonial positionality. Following historian Mark Stoll, I believe this to be the case because Muir's interpreters have also been his "disciples," mostly white Americans, wishfully thinking that Muir supported their own identities, conceptions of the world, and projects. For example, author and Muir "devotee" Mary Ellen Hannibal stated in 2014 that Muir represents "an ideal [way] of experiencing nature firsthand in a spiritual, transcendent way," and "all this postmodern talk about what Muir said and what his prejudices were is, at the end of the day, just words. What counts is the number of acres protected."³⁹¹ Most of Muir's biographers have lacked reflexivity, missing the implications of colonial common sense inherent in Muir's work. Cast under the weight of eloquence and word craft are the mechanisms of nineteenth-century imperialist nature writing. Critical environmental histories have successfully dispelled the myths that made Muir's legacy a hagiography, as well as the myth of the essentially ecologically friendly Indian, which posits that indigenous people are archetypically environmental, a sort of environmental "noble savage."³⁹² But few critical religious studies scholars have approached John Muir as a primary topic of research; they have devoted little extended attention to the environmental giant's religion and its relationship to the politics of nation-building. The phenomenological approach to

³⁹¹ Quoted in Louis Sahagun, "John Muir's death questioned as the centennial of his death nears," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 13, 2014. <http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-rethinking-muir-20141113-story.html#>.

³⁹² For instance, Evan Berry's *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Dorceta Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Carolyn Finn, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and Kerry Mitchell, *Spirituality and the State: Managing Nature and Experience in America's National Parks* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

the study of religion inherited from the nineteenth-century Euro-American academy has faced significant revision and challenge, though it still dominates the field of inquiry.³⁹³ However, critical reflection on the categories of religion, nature, nation, and indigeneity has recently received more attention, along with decolonial methodologies and theories of religious studies.³⁹⁴

To consider the colonial development of religion as a cross-cultural discourse is to recognize how it has gained much of its shape. Any analysis of religion in the Americas must consider the development of religious discourse in its colonial context. I define settler colonialism as the migration and appropriation of lands and resources by agents of an empire, distinct from the colonial geographic center or centers; the settler reconstructs land sovereignty.³⁹⁵ In relation to this thesis, imperial discourses of resource needs employed sovereignty rhetoric and law over indigenous lands, often expressing the need for protecting wilderness, over the needs of previous indigenous relationships to the lands. Muir may have thought that Mono Indians of the Sierra Nevada were equally human with white Euro-Americans, but they were not equally deserving of wilderness access and ownership. Narratives of necessary displacement helped to convince Americans of the moral innocence of controlling “wilderness.” Muir’s *fascino-prestigio*, or the allure of occupying a dominant social status, covered a multitude of sins, so to speak, of an encroaching empire displacing indigenous people from their land sovereignty. This discursive activity re-described the land so that indigenous sovereignty fell to the hegemony and coercion of the United States’ colonizing activity. The privileging of settler colonial language, terms, and concepts—such as “religion,” which operated

³⁹³ Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford, 1997); Tim Murphy, *The Politics of Spirit: Phenomenology, Genealogy, Religion* (Albany: State University of New York, 2010).

³⁹⁴ See, especially, Emma Tomalin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity: The Limits of Religious Environmentalism* (London: Routledge, 2009).

³⁹⁵ Mark Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense*, Kindle location 123, 238.

in both legal and cultural documents to oppress indigenous ways of life—is another form of the power relations that structured the colonizer/colonized relationship, another form of *symbolic violence*. In the process of “writing America,” in describing America, Muir made vast use of colonial linguistic and conceptual tools (such as describing indigenous ways as “superstition”), not least of which was the literary erasure of indigenous presence in what would become a “crown jewel” of the National Park System: Yosemite.³⁹⁶ This chapter will chart the settler colonial common sense present in Muir’s writings, and the colonial conditions they obscured, seeing Muir’s writings as a mythology of American expansion. Additionally, this chapter demonstrates that the purportedly universal ability to perceive of the divine or sacred—“religion”—that was common to Victorian discourses on comparative religion is actually a particularly Western, Christian conception of the world, which operated to force an organization of the world according to colonial terms.

Land dispossession was justified by settler colonial rhetoric; this rhetoric argued that indigenous peoples did not have the same concept of ownership, morality, or cultural development as “civilized” settler societies. Developing concepts of capitalism and citizenship, historian Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues in *The White Possessive: Power, Property, and Indigenous Sovereignty* that by the late 1700s, “people could legally own land, sell their labor, and possess their identities, all of which were formed through their relationship to capital and the state.”³⁹⁷ The “white property-owning subject” found “the best in life was the expansion of the self through property and property began and ended with possession of one’s body.”³⁹⁸

³⁹⁶ “Crown jewel” is a term often used to describe both the National Parks (as in the crown jewels of the nation) and of the most popular Parks. “Introduction: The National Park System,” https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/anps/anps_intro.htm.

³⁹⁷ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), Kindle edition, location 1249.

³⁹⁸ Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, location 1249. Moreton-Robinson is quoting Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin, eds., *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), 16.

Ownership was tied to the nation-state concept and hegemonic whiteness. Muir, despite pushing back against the commercialism of industrial capitalism, was not without the benefits of racialized property ownership. For all of Muir's diatribes, he still owned and operated private orchards, in California. Muir may have shunned the orchards as his "true home," but his wilderness adventures were made possible by his socio-economic position.³⁹⁹ Whatever "Muir-myths" one chooses to believe and proffer, they would not be possible without Muir's socio-economic and social status.

Indigeneity and Settler Colonial Positionality

What constitutes *indigenous* has been the source of much debate, not untouched by religious studies.⁴⁰⁰ The Latin origins of *indigenous* (*indigenae*) signify an authentic 'origins claim' for a people with a land territory.⁴⁰¹ The complexity and diversity of migration patterns, histories, and purposes complicates any essentialist definition of the term, instead using it only as a general term of relationality (dynamics of relationships) between peoples. Following the United Nations 1983 definition, indigeneity denotes "people who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at a time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them, by conquest, settlement, or other means, [and] reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition."⁴⁰² Property ownership can be difficult to frame, and sovereignty is complex. Nevertheless, differing concepts of land ownership and relationships to land can reveal the assumptions of scholars as well as the people

³⁹⁹ David Hickman, "John Muir's Orchard Home," *Pacific Historical Review*, 82, no. 3 (August 2013): 335-361.

⁴⁰⁰ Christopher Hartney and Daniel J. Tower, eds., *Religious Categories and the Construction of the Indigenous* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

⁴⁰¹ Garry W. Trompf, "Reflections on Indigeneity and Religion," in *Religious Categories and the Construction of the Indigenous*, ed. Christopher Hartney and Daniel J. Tower (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 8.

⁴⁰² Quoted in Trompf, "Reflections on Indigeneity and Religion," 10.

whom they study. Indigenous acquisition of colonial practices and aesthetics was not always forced, nor were the relationships always coercive; thus, there is justification for observing the complexities of colonial and indigenous relationalities, as “universals” may engender colonial enforcement of behavioral policing. A Gramscian approach to colonial cultural interactions should reflect on the internal negotiations of power interactions.

One cannot state that *religion* is essentially the same as (or solely the result of) colonialism, but rather that *religion*, as a discourse, has operated in colonial and indigenous relations. John Muir migrated to the United States as a Scottish settler colonialist, first on his father’s Wisconsin farm (Wisconsin was still occupied territory in Muir’s time) and later as he explored the Western territories, where he aided colonial settlement. In Wisconsin Muir showed sympathy for Native American peoples driven out of their farms by settlers, as when he recalled a conversation between his father and a neighbor who were discussing the rights of Indians and land ownership; John sided with his neighbor’s argument against his father’s strong ideology of manifest destiny.⁴⁰³ However, Muir’s sentiments towards land ownership reflected genteel cultural tastes, a kind of wild-but-civilized presentation that constituted the genteel colonial fantasy of the “Boston men.”⁴⁰⁴ Muir pressed for the protection of landscapes from corporations, while simultaneously implying that Native American property dispossession was unfortunate. However, Muir also contributed to large-scale wilderness land dispossession, which he justified by what he believed to be Indians’ improper reverence and lack of cleanliness in the wilderness. The manner in which nineteenth-century colonial literature represented indigenous peoples gave the impression that they were no longer present in these occupied territories, such as the National

⁴⁰³ John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, 218-220.

⁴⁰⁴ This term will be unpacked below, but it indicates a term used by Natives in the North American Northwest for intellectuals or missionaries in the Northwest Territories.

Parks. This appears to be, in part, a response to white Park visitors' disillusionment when the Indians they experienced did not match the "handsome and noble" Indian common in popular settler literature.⁴⁰⁵

Muir used this tactic when describing Yosemite in *Our National Parks* (first edition 1901; Yosemite became a National Park in 1890): "The Indians are dead now, and so are most of the hardly less striking free trappers of the early romantic Rocky Mountain times. Arrows, bullets, scalping-knives, need no longer be feared; and all the wilderness is peace fully open."⁴⁰⁶ Muir's wilderness was free of Indians, which enabled white Americans to imagine wilderness without colonialist fears. Muir's genteel habitus, though not always unsympathetic to the physically violent victimization of indigenous peoples, made plenty of room for symbolic violence against the presence of indigenous peoples. Yosemite natives—a mix of Mono-Paiute, Sierra Miwok, and Yokut, primarily—inhabited the Valley in dynamic, adaptive fashion until mining and environmental degradation, combined with encroaching settler dwelling and recreational activity, drove them out over many decades; the process of dispossession and the loss of sovereignty started in 1851. Yosemite was primarily maintained by the state of California beginning with President Lincoln's signing the Yosemite Park Act of 1864 (four years prior to Muir's arrival), which put some distance between California and the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and War Department until it was transferred to federal jurisdiction in 1890;⁴⁰⁷ the state management resulted in a more protracted process of dispossession of native

⁴⁰⁵ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford, 1999), 109.

⁴⁰⁶ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 15.

⁴⁰⁷ Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 21, 45-47. Yosemite served as precedence for the Yellowstone National Park, despite Yosemite receiving that title in succession.

inhabitants in comparison to the more swift dispossession in the Yellowstone National Park (est. 1886), which was managed in coordination with federal forces more directly.⁴⁰⁸

Yosemite natives also comprised a large portion of the park's workforce.⁴⁰⁹ Well into the first decades of the twentieth century, the Park presented Yosemite natives as part of the landscape, a spectacle to behold under the colonial gaze shaped by settler literature, and thus as part of settler entertainment.⁴¹⁰ Since the Yosemite Indians did not have federal recognition as tribes (as thus able to receive legal status and, in some cases, benefits and protections), they were under an unofficial patronizing relationship with the park officials; Yosemite natives largely received harsher punishments than their white counterparts for violating cultural norms, such as gambling, which is a prominent pastime in many North American indigenous cultures.⁴¹¹ In 1929, Park Superintendent Charles Thomson met with the indigenous community to tell them that their "residence [in the valley was] a privilege, not a vested right."⁴¹² By the 1930s, lack of "proper" assimilation led to the "ejection" of Yosemite's native community from its traditional village into new, settler-style housing in 1935. By this time only sixty-six indigenous Yosemite residents remained.⁴¹³

Muir, like Thoreau in Boston, became interested in the languages, mythologies, and practices of indigenous peoples during his travels in the Alaskan territories, first in 1879, then again in 1880 and 1890, but fascination with a culture does not separate settlers from a colonial project.⁴¹⁴ Peoples with mythologies that fit into Muir's conception of nature as an

⁴⁰⁸ Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 108.

⁴⁰⁹ Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 109.

⁴¹⁰ Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 117.

⁴¹¹ Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 119.

⁴¹² Charles G. Thomson, "Thomson to Director, NPS, June 25, 1929, "Indians-General, I-5, YNPRL. Quoted in Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 122.

⁴¹³ Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 125. NPS Director Horace M. Albright felt that indigenous people should "have long since been banished from the Park."

⁴¹⁴ Richard F. Fleck, *Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Indians* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1985), 50.

interconnected cosmic (ecological) system and direct revelation of God, of human companionship with nonhumans, and of cultural behaviors that fit into his range of “productive” behavior fared more favorably with Muir. For example, Muir was impressed with the Tlingit society’s work ethic.⁴¹⁵ Muir *may* have found resonance with indigenous forms (narratives, practices, or words), but they were still subject to his own genteel conditioning. Muir’s appreciation for Tlingit totems, dancing, and myths developed from his observation of their “accurate” imitation of animals.⁴¹⁶ Muir love of “tinkering” resonated with the craftsmanship of the Tlingit carving culture. Muir wrote in *Travels in Alaska*:

The magnitude of the ruins [of an old Tlingit village] and the excellence of the workmanship manifest in them was astonishing as belonging to Indians. For example, the first dwelling we visited was about forty feet square, with walls built of planks two feet wide and six inches thick. The ridgepole of yellow cypress was two feet in diameter, forty feet long, and as round and true as if it had been turned in a lathe; and, though lying in the damp weeds, it was still perfectly sound. The nibble marks of the stone adze were still visible, though crusted over with scale lichens in most places. The pillars that had supported the ridgepole were still standing in some of the ruins. They were all, as far as I observed, carved into life-size figures of men, women, and children, fishes, birds, and various other animals, such as the beaver, wolf, or bear. Each of the wall planks had evidently been hewn out of a whole log, and must have required sturdy deliberation as well as skill. Their geometrical truthfulness was admirable. With the same tools not one in a thousand of our skilled mechanics could do as good work. Compared with it the bravest work of civilized backwoodsmen is feeble and bungling. The completeness of form, finish, and proportion of these timbers suggested skill of a wild and positive kind, like that which guides the woodpecker in drilling round holes, and the bee in making its cells. The carved totem-pole monuments are the most striking of the objects displayed here.⁴¹⁷

Muir would expand his appreciation for the “industrious” Kake (a subgroup of the Tlingit), when he inquired about human bones on the ground of a village:

In answer to my inquiries, one of our crew said they probably belonged to Sitka Indians slain in war. These Kakes are shrewd, industrious, and rather good-looking people. It was at their largest village that an American schooner was seized and all the crew except one

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Fleck, *Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Indians*, 57.

⁴¹⁷ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 71-72.

man murdered. A gunboat sent to punish them burned the village. I saw the anchor of the ill-fated vessel lying near the shore.⁴¹⁸

Muir would later comment on the Kakes' lack of superstition when they were kicking the bones (not being afraid of supernatural consequences).

Industry and technology shaped Muir's thinking about race since at least his days living in Indiana working for a machinist company (Osgood, Smith, and Co.) where he wanted to make his "invention mark." During this time Muir demonstrated ideologies of ethnic superiority.⁴¹⁹ In a letter to his brother Daniel H. Muir dated May 7, 1866, Muir wrote that "the Scotch are the salt of the earth—and the salt of machines."⁴²⁰ Muir would warn his brother Dan:

I hope you will be very perroteekeler⁴²¹ __ begin well __ remember the nation to whom you belong, and the age in which you live - its streets must be troddin not by "black Gentoos & pagan Turks"⁴²² [Hindus and Muslims] but by the white & fexin loving⁴²³ people of the sons of Japheth, and [Indianapolis's]⁴²⁴ squares and avenues must be shone upon by the sun of the nineteenth century.⁴²⁵

Worster argues that this is an "unusually racist moment" where Muir tries to define himself as a sort of "Aryan instrument of modern civilization fighting against the dark-skinned forces of alien paganism."⁴²⁶ However, six years later, Muir wrote to his friend Jean Carr that he had "read your

⁴¹⁸ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 126.

⁴¹⁹ Muir, M [John Muir] to Daniel H. Muir, 7 May, 1866, JMP, I: 431. Quoted in Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 105. From the John Muir Papers, stored at the University of the Pacific.

⁴²⁰ Muir, M [John Muir] to Daniel H. Muir, 7 May, 1866, JMP, I: 431 and 12 August 1866. Quoted in Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 105. From the John Muir Papers, stored at the University of the Pacific.

⁴²¹ I have not been able to ascertain any meaning of precedence for this word. It has been transcribed by the Holt-Atherton Special Collections and Worster with the same spelling. It is possible that the word is a Scottish phonological representation of "particular," if the first letter is a 'p' instead of an 'f.' In context, this might make sense. Muir may be telling his brother to be particular. But that is not certain. My thanks to William Ramp of the University of Lethbridge for insights into nineteenth-century Scottish diction and phonology.

⁴²² Muir's quotations here invite inquiry. What he intended to do with them is unclear.

⁴²³ Worster transcribes this as "loving," while the transcribers for the Holt-Atherton Special collections translate it as "Coaing." Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 105.

⁴²⁴ The word here is "its," but it denotes the city of Indianapolis where Daniel was.

⁴²⁵ John Muir, "Letter from John Muir to David Gilrye Muir, 1866 Aug 12," JMP, (<https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/jmcl/17906/>). I added the ' __ ' after "began well," which neither the official transcription nor Worster's do. This is my transcription of the letter. The official transcription states "[illegible] of the [illegible]teenth century," but I think that it is clear from the photograph of the letter what is written.

⁴²⁶ Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 105.

Hindu extracts with much interest” and expressed appreciation for “Hindu” literature.⁴²⁷

Moreover, while in Bombay, India, Muir regarded the way in which the local people respected monkeys, the way “Hindoos however poor always try to help their tailed neighbors in getting a living.”⁴²⁸ Whatever Muir intended with his words in his letter to his brother, religion-making was central to Muir’s understanding of race, ethnicity, and history.

Whether engaging Yosemite natives, Tlingit in Alaska, or locals during his India travels, Muir found areas of resonance with the stories and practices that he encountered. It is important to note that indigenous people also adopt beliefs and practices of their colonizers, or foreign visitors. As this project developed, I found it helpful to articulate, if theoretically, the concept of *cooperative discourse*. *Cooperative discourse* recognizes that when people travel with their conceptions of the world, coming into contact with people who hold other conceptions of the world, finding similarities that create discourses of homology or an underlying “truth,” then there exists a *cooperative discourse* that posits sameness which may be used to present an essence behind linguistic differences. This becomes important when exploring how certain settler narratives described indigenous ways of living as religion instead of as superstition, idolatry, or other comparable nodes of discourse. Cooperative discourse constructs the concept of religion cross-culturally, either bolstering one’s own authoritative concept, or creating an operational homology that supports the project of the person employing the homology. Muir made use of cooperative discourse when indigenous or foreign ways (discourses and practices) of life seemed to fit his genteel habitus. For instance, Tlingit behaviors were deemed “superstitions” by Muir unless they gained his respect by cooperating with his sentiments of a progressive, anti-

⁴²⁷ John Muir to Jeanne Carr, Yosemite Valley, March 16, 1872. *Kindred and Related Spirits*, 173.

⁴²⁸ John Muir, “Letter from John Muir to [Family], 1903 Oct 23,”

<http://digitalcollections.pacific.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/muirletters/id/16316/rec/1>.

anthropocentric theology, as well as the ideology of industriousness common to genteel philosophy. It is only then that Muir appears to describe their beliefs and practices in terms of comparative religion.⁴²⁹ Muir wrote in *Travels in Alaska* that the Tlingit were taken aback by his botanical exercises: “[Muir] seems to spend most of his time among stumps and weeds. I saw him the other day on his knees, looking at a stump as if he expected to find gold in it. He seems to have no serious object whatever.’ One night when a heavy rainstorm was blowing I [Muir] unwittingly caused a lot of wondering excitement among the whites as well as the superstitious Indians.”⁴³⁰ The excitement was caused by Muir tying himself to the top of a tall tree during a vicious storm to see how “the Alaska trees behave in storms and hear the songs they sing.”⁴³¹ Muir reinforced the stereotype of the superstitious Indian when he described responses to the phenomenon called St. Elmo’s fire, although in this case it appears the whites had equally dramatic reactions. Muir wrote, “[Explanations of St. Elmo’s Fire], though not convincingly clear, perhaps served to veil their own astonishment and in some measure to diminish the superstitious fears of the natives; but from what I heard, the few whites who happened to see the strange light wondered about as wildly as the Indians.”⁴³²

Indigenous people have used settler language and terminology to communicate their experiences, yet the rhetorical strategies for doing so given colonial conditions should be considered.⁴³³ For instance, arguments for equal protection of religious rights were heavily employed with the appearance of the Ghost Dance and the Shaker conflicts in the Pacific Northwest against the pervasive ideology in the Bureau of Indian Affairs that saw Indian religion

⁴²⁹ Fleck, *Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Indians*, 57-58.

⁴³⁰ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 21.

⁴³¹ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 21

⁴³² Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 24.

⁴³³ Sergei Kan cautions the “hegemonic model” as not allowing for indigenous sovereignty in accepting Christianity on their own terms. Kan offers the example of the Orthodox Tlingit Christians who rejected capitalist encroachment on Tlingit traditions of economics, sustenance, and other cultural practices. Kan, *Memory Eternal*, xx.

as “inclined to superstition.”⁴³⁴ This should not, however, negate indigenous agency in adopting, believing, or internalizing colonial religion. Indigenous informants in critical ethnographic work demonstrate that Christianity was not solely an imperial imposition.⁴³⁵ Where Muir did mention Tlingit people talking about religion, it reads like a conversion narrative that exalts Christianity over “Tlingit religion.” Whether this is Muir’s rhetorical tactic only, or if it is a faithful recollection of indigenous expressions of Christian piety, one cannot be totally sure. This was, however, common in Victorian travel literature narratives. Muir’s missionary friend Samuel Hall Young understood Tlingit interest in Christianity as being more concerned with social strategy than spiritual conversion.⁴³⁶ This perspective itself could be colonial common sense, as its assumptions about the authenticity of Tlingit Christian may be shaped by Western, colonial, and Euro-American Protestant missionary ideals. Tisa Wenger’s work on the Pueblo dance controversies demonstrates that the discourse of religion has carried weight in preserving customs and ceremonies by labeling them “religious” or “religion.”⁴³⁷ In Muir’s *Travels in Alaska*, he recalls a near-conflict (Muir called it a “sacrilege”) when an “archeologist doctor” tried to cut down a totem pole. A representative member of the Kadachan family of the Tlingit people who was also a member of the newly organized Wrangell Presbyterian Church set the archeologist straight: “How would you like to have an Indian go to a graveyard and break down and carry away a monument belonging to your family?”⁴³⁸ Muir stated that in this case, “religious relations,” gifts, and apologies staved off violence, presenting religion as a peace-

⁴³⁴ Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom: A Contested History of an American Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 108-109.

⁴³⁵ Kan, *Memory Eternal*, location 500.

⁴³⁶ Samuel Hall Young, *Hall Young of Alaska: “The Mushing Parson”: The Autobiography of Samuel Hall Young* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1928), 136.

⁴³⁷ Wenger, *We Have a Religion*, 59, 135.

⁴³⁸ John Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 74-75.

making force.⁴³⁹ Muir's story demonstrates that framing Tlingit material culture (totems) as religious served as preservationist rhetoric, making use of cooperative discourse that elided the differences between the totems and idols or gods.

Western hegemony shaped the rhetoric of Muir's American mythology. Decolonial analysis, here, requires that we recognize that indigenous uses of colonial terms may be counter-hegemonic strategies to modes of inhabiting a world of colonial relations. As historian Jennifer Graber has demonstrated, authenticating indigenous culture *as religious* (by indigenous people or their allies) has protected some indigenous practices from prohibition and violent discipline from Euro-American colonialism.⁴⁴⁰ Discourses and rhetoric of authentic indigenous performance protected indigenous ways and sites of living in National Parks such as Yosemite and Yellowstone, though indigenous performance of authenticity was always in contention with settler colonial images of the "authentic Indian."

White settler common sense further shaped access to and cultural practices in American wilderness. Muir's Sierra Club supported a whites-only policy until the 1920s for Yellowstone National Park, but Muir's advocacy for indigenous people was limited to those whom he found to reflect his Romantic view of nature, which was human-free except for those clean enough to keep it pure, evident apparently as the anti-thesis to "dirty" hygiene and appearance of the Mono Indians.⁴⁴¹ Many of America's most famous nineteenth-century botanists and scientists made parallels between plant and human classification systems. Harvard's Asa Gray, Presbyterian confidant and friend to both John Muir and Charles Darwin, believing botany reflected the same principles as those of human evolution, wrote in 1861,

⁴³⁹ John Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 75.

⁴⁴⁰ Jennifer Graber, *The Gods of Indian Country: Religion and the Struggle for the American West*, 78.

⁴⁴¹ Mark Dowie, *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict Between Global Conservation and Native Peoples* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2009), 11.

It is only the backward glance, the gaze up the long vista of the past, that reveals anything alarming. Here the lines converge as they recede into the geological ages, and point to conclusions which, upon the theory, are inevitable, but hardly welcome. The very first step backward makes the negro and the Hottentot our blood-relations; — not that reason or Scripture objects to that, though pride may.⁴⁴²

Scientific racism held a strong place in botanical studies in the nineteenth century. Just as the Sequoia was the noblest of trees, so too white genteel culture was the noblest of human cultures. Gray, however, felt less strongly about the reality of race independent of human culture than Muir's other evolutionary scientist friend, Joseph LeConte.⁴⁴³ This did not stop Gray from heavily employing racial language in his scientific analysis.⁴⁴⁴

Muir's fellow Sierra Club founder and friend Joseph LeConte expressed a stronger view on racial hierarchies in the book, *The Race Problem in the South*, which appeared the same year as the Sierra Club's founding in 1892 and analyzed "inferior races"⁴⁴⁵ White culture, according to LeConte, was the necessary component for civilization.⁴⁴⁶ Muir may have objected to "Lord-man," the term he used for what he saw as humanity's lust for material gain, but he still held that humans should reflect certain cultural norms. When Muir wrote of the "noblest of races," he was referring to the Giant Sequoia, but he used this racial language also to refer to Emerson, a man in the pantheon of genteel culture; Muir's racial scientific ideology fit into LeConte's ideology that

⁴⁴² Asa Gray, *Natural Selection Not Consistent with Natural Theology: A Free Examination of Darwin's Treatise on the Origins of Species, and of its American Reviewers* (London: Trübner & Co., 1861), 5. Gray precedes this with: "It is by no means difficult to believe that varieties are incipient or possible species, when we see what trouble naturalists, especially botanists, have to distinguish between them, — one regarding as a true species what another regards as a variety ; when the progress of knowledge continually increases, rather than diminishes, the number of doubtful instances ; and when there is less agreement than ever among naturalists as to what is the basis in Nature upon which our idea of species reposes, or how the word is to be defined. Indeed, when we consider the endless disputes of naturalists and ethnologists over the human races, as to whether they belong to one species or to more, and if to more, whether to three, or five, or fifty, we can hardly help fancying that both may be right, — or rather, that the uni-humanitarians would have been right several thousand years ago, and the multi-humanitarians will be a few thousand years later ; while at present the safe thing to say is, that probably there is some truth on both sides."

⁴⁴³ Brown, *Until Darwin, Science, Human Variety and the Origins of Race*, 131.

⁴⁴⁴ Asa Gray, *Sequoia and Its History: An Address* (Salem: Salem Press, 1872).

⁴⁴⁵ Joseph LeConte, *The Race Problem in the South* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1982).

⁴⁴⁶ LeConte, *The Race Problem in the South*, 360.

all knowledge must fit into classification systems, with both people and plant classifications reflecting one another.⁴⁴⁷

Mobilizing the East to Mythologize in the West

From John Muir's early school days to his University of Wisconsin years (1861-1863), he was inundated with the literature and benefits of settler colonialism. The ideology of American colonialism is represented in a 1900 book about Muir's university, *The University of Wisconsin, Its History and Its Alumni, With Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Madison*.⁴⁴⁸ This book offers insight into the intellectual system that helped to produce Muir. The book explains how the Black Hawk War (1832) had ended by "humbling" the Indians of northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin and paving the way for the conditions for the University of Wisconsin. The state of Wisconsin was engaged in frontier warfare against local tribes at the time that it expanded settler colonialist agricultural and resource development while constructing its state university. Muir's sentiments towards indigenous peoples were shaped by his encounters with local tribes near his Wisconsin farm. His genteel university teachers instructed him in the genteel literature of an expanding nation. When Muir wrote with sympathy about indigenous peoples in Wisconsin, he felt that land dispossession was regrettable, but dispossession sympathy had its limits for Muir's wilderness fantasies.⁴⁴⁹ Muir read Thoreau, Emerson, and numerous other lesser known authors who, despite their seemingly sympathetic disposition towards indigenous suffering, were still writing from the position of settler colonial projects. These projects are suggested by Mark Rifkin's comments on Thoreau: "Space must be voided of Native presence in

⁴⁴⁷ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 80, 135.

⁴⁴⁸ Ruben Gold Thwaites, *The University of Wisconsin, Its History and Its Alumni, With Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Madison* (Madison: J.N. Purcell, 1900), 3.

⁴⁴⁹ John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, 218-220.

order for it to offer the possibility of a non-native ethics of purifying regeneration—living like an Indian, not among them.”⁴⁵⁰ Americanist Sarina Isenberg notes that Emerson and Thoreau “Westernized” Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian texts so that they fit their visions of theological liberalism.⁴⁵¹ The handling of North American and Asian literature took place in the larger imperial context of genteel cultural production.⁴⁵² Rifkin offers a similar critique of Hawthorne and Thoreau:

Unlike in *The House of the Seven Gables* where Indians mark a wrong form of landholding and generationality, Indianness in Walden helps concretize the existence of a simplified mode of being in/as nature at odds with expanding and intensifying capitalist networks. However, that space must be voided of Native presence in order for it to offer the possibility of a non-native ethics of purifying regeneration—living like an Indian, not among them.⁴⁵³

The ability to wield the image and discourse of “the Indian,” both Asian and North American, served as the cultural capital for the genteel class. And yet, the actual person considered Indian must not occupy the space imagined by settler fantasies of wilderness. Nineteenth-century genteel high culture used the *fascino-prestigio* of knowledge of faraway lands to boost one’s ethos at the expense of indigenous sovereignty.

Descriptions of religion appeared often in interactions between proselytizing travelers (including Muir) and indigenous people (often ones whom travel narratives said had converted to Christianity). Muir frequently mentioned religious themes, such as conversion, church, burial rituals, and spirits, in *Travels in Alaska*.⁴⁵⁴ This is significant. The default rhetorical choice to homologize churches and gravestones with totem poles was an attempt to persuade Euro-

⁴⁵⁰ Mark Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense*, Kindle location 2000.

⁴⁵¹ Sarina Isenberg, “Translating World Religions: Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau’s ‘Ethical Scriptures’ Column in *The Dial*,” *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal*, vol. 11, 1 (2013): 18-36.

⁴⁵² Michael J. Altman, *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893* (New York: Oxford, 2017).

⁴⁵³ Rifkin, *Settler Common Sense*, location 2006.

⁴⁵⁴ John Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 70, 171.

Americans to respect common sense frames, drawing on sentiments of the sacred with hegemonic sites of power; appeals to Christianity for the power to preserve and protect from settler pothunters and scholars came through the common sense discourse of Christian sacred space. Whether or not Muir *was* a Christian matters little for his ability to move audiences who were conditioned to respond to his Christian discourse. Muir's intellectual training and proficiency prepared him to engage in *place-making*, or the act of creating space into place, giving it an identity. As nonurban spaces outside of "civilization" began to *take place* alongside the development and expansion of national space, wilderness narratives gave rise to counter-hegemonic activities from indigenous people who rejected "wilderness" as something other than "home."⁴⁵⁵ Muir writes in *Steep Trails* about the Modoc War (1872-1872) and the "treacherous Modoc" who killed American peacekeepers.⁴⁵⁶ In reality, Muir was mirroring a myth of innocence and redemptive violence that baptized ethnic cleansing into a nineteenth-century Christian discourse shaped by a rhetoric of white victimhood that imagined settlers as victims of Indian aggression.⁴⁵⁷ Muir told a different story about the Indians of the Yosemite Valley, who did not "hold [Yosemite] for a single day."⁴⁵⁸ This was also a myth. Oratory was important to Indian resistance, though oratorical resistance still played by the rules of Euro-American

⁴⁵⁵ Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," in *Uncommon Grounds: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1996), 144.

⁴⁵⁶ Muir, *Steep Trails*, 93; Boyd Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War: Redemptive Violence and the Making of American Innocence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid. Muir wrote: "Next morning the crisp, sunshiny air made even the Modoc landscape less hopeless, and we ventured down the bluff to the edge of the Lava Beds. Just at the foot of the bluff we came to a square enclosed by a stone wall. This is a graveyard where lie buried thirty [US] soldiers, most of whom met their fate out in the Lava Beds, as we learn by the boards marking the graves — a gloomy place to die in, and deadly-looking even without Modocs. The poor fellows that lie here deserve far more pity than they have ever received. Picking our way over the strange ridges and hollows of the beds, we soon came to a circular flat about twenty yards in diameter, on the shore of the lake, where the comparative smoothness of the lava and a few handfuls of soil have caused the grass tufts to grow taller. This is where General Canby was slain while seeking to make peace with the treacherous Modocs."

⁴⁵⁸ Muir, *Steep Trails*, 95

rhetorical styles.⁴⁵⁹ Native American resistance eventually employed the federal channels of legislation and policies, such as the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which the Tlingit and other Alaskan indigenous people have employed to reclaim stewardship rights over resources, ritual objects, and sustenance acquisition rights.⁴⁶⁰ Muir developed place-making rhetoric that Americanized wondrous natural (i.e., nonurban) spaces, scenes, and objects, which was only complete when devoid of a human presence, with the exception of the worthy visitor. Muir may have bucked against “civilization” in a sense, but he did much to reinforce the civilized myth of the nation’s wilderness. Muir famously remarked that

thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life. Awakening from the stupefying effects of the vice of over-industry and the deadly apathy of luxury, they are trying as best they can to mix and enrich their own little ongoings with those of Nature, and to get rid of rust and disease.⁴⁶¹

However, this wilderness was “by means of good roads. . . brought nearer to civilization,”

braiding what was at the turn of the century three myths of American exceptionalism:

wilderness, technology, and infrastructure superiority.⁴⁶² All three of these developments were feverishly creating national identity as the twentieth century dawned on the nation. The concept of wilderness developed largely in genteel circles, which shaped how Americans would understand American wilderness in ways that largely benefitted the genteel class.

⁴⁵⁹ Sandra M. Gustofson, *Eloquence Is Power: Oratory & Performance in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 75-110.

⁴⁶⁰ Thomas F. Thornton, “A Tale of Three Parks: Tlingit Conservation, Representation, and Repatriation in Southeast Alaska’s National Parks,” *Human Organization*, 69, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 107-118.

⁴⁶¹ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 1.

⁴⁶² Muir, *Our National Parks*, 2; David Lourter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington’s National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 37-40.

Mythologizing Genteel Wilderness: John Muir and the Genteel Ideology of Nature

Muir described his distaste for the term “hiking,” preferring the Euro-American term “sauntering about,” which Muir framed as religious. His friend Albert W. Palmer recorded him as saying,

“I don’t like either the word [hike] or the thing. People ought to saunter in the mountains - not ‘hike!’ Do you know the origin of that word saunter? It’s a beautiful word. Away back in the Middle Ages people used to go on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and when people in the villages through which they passed asked where they were going they would reply, ‘A la sainte terre’, ‘To the Holy Land.’ And so they became known as sainte-terre-ers or saunterers. Now these mountains are our Holy Land, and we ought to saunter through them reverently, not ‘hike’ through them.”⁴⁶³

Muir understood his own religious practice of sauntering in the wilderness at odds with the religious practices of Native Americans inhabiting the National Park and wilderness areas, especially his perception that they were fearful of spirits, which he used to describe them as ‘superstitious.’⁴⁶⁴ One may see the use of such a loaded term (superstition) as a function of colonial logic in Victorian travel literature and anthropology texts, which were representative of literary cultural production in the nineteenth century. Wilderness served as the stage for genteel testing grounds, where self-culture was perfected and completed. Muir experienced wilderness with genteel, colonial judgements in *Travels in Alaska*:

Though all the Thlinkit tribes believe in witch craft, they are less superstitious in some respects than many of the lower classes of whites. Chief Yana Taowk seemed to take pleasure in kicking the Sitka [Kake] bones that lay in his way, and neither old nor young showed the slightest trace of superstitious fear of the dead at any time.⁴⁶⁵

Even Muir’s Tlingit friends thought that he was a *nakws’ aati*, a witch-like figure, because of the way in which he enjoyed the harsh terrain; Muir’s jovial yet professional disposition towards mountaineering and glacial exploration reflected the genteel positionality of the ascending

⁴⁶³ Albert W. Palmer, *The Mountain Trail and Its Message* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1911), 27-28.

⁴⁶⁴ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 263-264.

⁴⁶⁵ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 126.

middle-class and upper-classes that largely comprised mountaineer communities in the United States.⁴⁶⁶

Muir was drawn to the mountains. Having secured the mountaineer's coveted first ascents for himself, Muir solidified a reputation as a capable mountaineer.⁴⁶⁷ Despite the Alaskan natives' fascination over Muir's climbing and hiking feats, Muir's Victorian mountaineering culture has a long history of conquest ideology.⁴⁶⁸ Mountain conquest and the accompanying literature charted colonized territories, which romantic descriptions of the act of mountaineering itself tended to obscure.⁴⁶⁹ Moreover, according to historian Erica Goldman, Muir may have held a "summit at all costs" attitude that defied his sauntering ideology, an ideology that was entangled with ideologies of masculinity, society, and race.⁴⁷⁰ As religious studies scholar Evan Berry has noted, primitivism and industrialism have been the "twin engines" of American recreation, which is true for leisure as well as more extreme endeavors.⁴⁷¹ There exists an implicit anthropological and cultural habitus in mountaineering acts that Victorian, genteel ideologies of primitivism and self-culture worked to shape (especially masculine and imperial). In the Gramscian sense, the allure of the brave Victorian mountaineer may be understood in the frame of *fascino-prestigio*, or the fascination and prestige that accompanied the performance of

⁴⁶⁶ Kim Heacox, *John Muir and the Ice That Started a Fire: How a Visionary and the Glaciers of Alaska Changed America* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2014), Kindle Edition, Location 113; Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 146.

⁴⁶⁷ Terry Gifford, *Reconnecting with John Muir: Essays in Post-Pastoral Practice* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 143.

⁴⁶⁸ Alan McNee, *The New Mountaineer in Late Victorian Britain: Materiality, Modernity, and the Haptic Sublime* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016) 22-23.

⁴⁶⁹ Erica Goldman, "John Muir and Clarence King at the Historic Crossroads of American Mountain Climbing," Sierra Club.com. Accessed 7/12/2018. (https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/life/why_climb_mountains_by_eric_goldman.aspx) This article was originally written for the Yale American Studies Seminar, "Wilderness and the American Imagination," Fall, 1995.

⁴⁷⁰ Erica Goldman, "John Muir and Clarence King at the Historic Crossroads of American Mountain Climbing,"; Francis O'Gorman, "'The Mightiest Evangel of the Alpine Club': Agnosticism in the Alpine Writings of John Tyndall," in *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture*, ed. Andrew Bradstock (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000), 134-148.

⁴⁷¹ Berry, *Devoted to Nature*, 55-56.

high culture; mountaineering represented the freedom and capital to undergo such endeavors. Muir benefited from the cultural capital of mountaineering feats. In spite of the “reformed sinner” approach to Muir’s relationship with indigenous people (such as that of Richard Fleck), where Muir appears to have demonstrated increased positivity towards Native Americans over time, there are still complications in Muir’s legacy and writings that implicate him in imperial, colonial projects. Muir’s relationships with indigenous friends did not preclude his role in the mythologizing of American space at the expense of indigenous claims.

Religion-making discourse captures nonhuman authorities (such as gods) and mythologies together in competition and collaboration with one another. One may consider the religion-making habits from Thoreau to American literary scholar Richard F. Fleck. Fleck notes the category of “superstition” as distinct from the category of “religion” when he discusses Thoreau’s observations of indigenous cultures.⁴⁷² Nineteenth-century scholars, philosophers, and travel writers used the term ‘superstitious’ to de-legitimize beliefs and structures of knowledge deemed outside of the realm of reason and religion.⁴⁷³ Following historian Linnie Marsh Wolfe, Fleck describes Muir’s “universal religion” as appealing to the Tlingit.⁴⁷⁴ This is misleading and it overlooks Muir’s Anglo-American settler colonial positionality and ideological distinction.

⁴⁷² Richard F. Fleck, *Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Indians* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1985).

⁴⁷³ John Ruskin, *An Inquiry into the Present Conditions Affecting “The Study of Architecture” in Our Schools* (New York: John Wiley & Son, 1866), 19. John Ruskin well summed up a common nineteenth-century sentiment: “Superstition contemplates its idols as lords of death, appeases them with blood, and vows itself to them in torture and solitude. Religion proselytizes by love, superstition by war; religion teaches by example, superstition by persecution.” Journalist William H. D. Adams claimed in 1882 that superstition is the “shadow of Religion, and from the shadow we may infer the nature of the substance or object that casts it,” a degradation of a universal compulsion of humanity. William Henry Davenport Adams, *Curiosities of Superstitions, and Sketches of some Unrevealed Religions* (London: J. Masters & Co., 1882), 302. Jason Josephson-Storm has demonstrated that “superstition” has historically been tied to carving out “religion” and “science” as distinct from less authoritative practices. Jason Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 14.

⁴⁷⁴ Fleck, *Henry Thoreau and John Muir Among the Indians*, 66.

Muir read the travel journal of Methodist missionary Egerton Ryerson Young, *By Canoe and Dog-train Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians* (1890), which may hold clues to some of the ideas that were in play in Muir's conceptual framework. Muir also read Methodist theology and hymnals.⁴⁷⁵ Both Muir and Young expressed sentiments akin to the progressive reformers who labored to stave off Catholic and indigenous influences on future generations of native children and sought to limit the "uncivilized" behaviors and practices of Native Americans.⁴⁷⁶ This was very present in Young as it was in Muir.⁴⁷⁷ In Young's account of a discussion he had with an Indian, Young inquired, "What is your religion? If you have any clear idea of a religion, tell me in what you believe." The Indian's answer: "We believe in a good Spirit and in a bad spirit." The conceptualizations of spirits by the Indian in Young's story amounts to religion-making rhetoric, whereby local traditions are *religionized* to make sense in settler society.⁴⁷⁸

The conversation between Young and a Cree man played out such that Young's indigenous companion claimed that Indians worshipped "idols" because

⁴⁷⁵ Muir's personal library, held at the University of the Pacific, holds numerous Methodist works, and Muir was known to be active in Methodist churches in his youth. Moreover, Muir held a number of close Methodist friends. He himself, however, did not make an identification as a Methodist.

⁴⁷⁶ Muir had a paradoxical relationship with "civilization."

⁴⁷⁷ Egerton Ryerson Young, *By Canoe and Dog-train Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1890), 86. Young would lament treatment of the Cree and indigenous people at large: "But in dealing with these Indian tribes there is always present to the conscientious Anglo-Saxon the question of the possible elevation of such rude natures as these Cree and Saltaux [*sic*] Indians. Our efforts as a nation to solve this problem are among the parts of our national history which are least creditable to us. We have made sad work of what we style governing them. Our treatment of them in times of peace has been as little complimentary to us as our treatment of them in war, and the supreme folly of much of our military conduct in dealing with them is symbolized by the summary of General Grant of one of our Indian campaigns, "We spent six millions of dollars and killed six Indians." (2) Contrast with the footnote below.

⁴⁷⁸ Young, *By Canoe and Dog-train Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians*, 86. Young crudely expressed his sentiments here: "The transformation of these natural hunters into settled agriculturists, and the introduction among them of the amenities of cultured and settled society, is a work which has had but very moderate success from the standpoint of civil government. The missionary has been the only civilizer of these races. But the further interest to all truly Christian people remains in the inquiry whether these rude and savage people can be brought to any worthy apprehension of the higher spiritual phases of our holy religion. May a soul rise from the state of a savage to the experiences of a saint? Can the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit enable these ruder and baser people to come, speedily, to appreciate and to share in the most delicate distinctions in the soul-life of those who represent centuries of Christian culture?" (2)

the Indian's mind is dark, and he cannot grasp the unseen. He hears the great Spirit's voice in the thunder and storms. He sees the evidences of His existence all around, but neither he nor his fathers have ever seen the great Spirit, or anyone who has; and so, he does not know what He looks like. But man is the highest creature that he knows of, and so he makes his idols like a man, and calls it his "Manito." We only worship them because we do not know what the great Spirit looks like, but these we can understand.⁴⁷⁹

Young referred to the Indians as "deluded" by idol worship: "Here and there were the tents of the old conjurers and medicine men, who, combining some knowledge of disease and medicine with a great deal of superstitious abominations, held despotic sway over the people."⁴⁸⁰ He considered these "conjurers and medicine men" "lazy old men" who used terror to get resources.⁴⁸¹ The Methodist missionary concluded his narrative with a victorious assessment:

And there, at what is called "the Meeting of the Three Rivers," on that very spot where idols were worshipped amidst horrid orgies, and where the yells, rattles, and drums of the old conjurers and medicine men were heard continuously for days and nights, there is now a little church, where these same Indians, transformed by the glorious Gospel of the Son of God, are "clothed and in their right mind, sitting at the feet of Jesus."⁴⁸²

It is not hard to see why Muir resonated with Young; in spite of Young's dislike of native religion, his account mentioned the scenic beauty and the eloquence of his native companions: "In their lost state, those scintillating bars of colored light [the aurora borealis] were the spirits of their forefathers, rank after rank, rushing out to battle. Yet, I have also had Indians as guides who became intensely interested in these wondrous visions of the night, but I never knew them to lose the trail or become confused as to the proper route."⁴⁸³ And, like Muir, Thoreau, and other popular American genteel authors, Young expressed respect for the Indians' "simplistic" ways of living.

⁴⁷⁹ Young, *By Canoe and Dog-train Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians*, 86-87.

⁴⁸⁰ Young, *By Canoe and Dog-train Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians*, 85.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸² Young, *By Canoe and Dog-train Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians*, 88.

⁴⁸³ Young, *By Canoe and Dog-train Among the Cree and Salteaux Indians*, 77-78, 81.

The presence of nature observation in the literature that Muir read is part of a larger tendency in settler literature that must be brought into sharper focus. One may note that *nature* and *wilderness* in the writings of colonialists like missionary Young are not the same as *things conceived of being nature or natural* within indigenous discourse. As environmental geographer Thomas F. Thornton explains, the Tlingit never wholly accepted the nature/culture dichotomy (especially in the National Parks) and in fact have actively resisted it.⁴⁸⁴ The idea of nature as a realm separate from human culture was a foreign concept to most indigenous worldviews.⁴⁸⁵ Even Muir's sanctification of nature retains some of the dualisms of Western thought—pure wilderness versus the city—which then was retained in National Park and Anglo-American conservation ideology led by a largely white, male, Protestant cohort.⁴⁸⁶ American theological and philosophical discourse pushed for dualisms—male/female, good/evil, city/wilderness, human/animal, culture/nature.⁴⁸⁷ As National Park historian Richard Sellars demonstrates, the Parks have historically retained their primary purpose of recreation and resource management; an anthropocentric utilitarian ethic has remained central to Park management.⁴⁸⁸ Emma Tomlin makes a similar point in discussing the environmental context of India that *nature as a whole* is largely a Western concept; Tomlin further contends that and “environmental worldviews” must be compared according to their differences as well as their similarities, highlighting how certain

⁴⁸⁴ Thomas F. Thornton, "A Tale of Three Parks: Tlingit Conservation, Representation, and Repatriation in Southeast Alaska's National Parks," *Human Organization* 69, no. 2 (2010): 107.

⁴⁸⁵ Thomas F. Thornton, *Being and Place Among the Tlingit* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 118-119.

⁴⁸⁶ Women and people of color have contributed to the American environmental movement in very important ways. Their stories and their actions have had to contend, however, with the legacies of white male environmental actors. Dorceta Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), location 1586-2115.

⁴⁸⁷ Much of Carolyn Merchant's work deals with this. Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁴⁸⁸ Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 106.

objects (animals, plants, landscapes) do not fit into the often capitalist and strategic Western conceptualizations of nature.⁴⁸⁹ In contrast to the preservationists' wilderness ethic of the nineteenth century (exemplified by Muir), as well as the more capitalist wilderness recreationist ethic of conservation (exemplified by Muir's once friend and later advisory, and first chief of the U.S. Forestry Service, Gifford Pinchot), indigenous people such as the Paiute of Owens Valley, California, (forced onto reservations in 1863) argued for water rights as a means of surviving, not of enjoying "nature."⁴⁹⁰ The Paiutes have continued to fight for water rights into the twenty-first century.⁴⁹¹

Whatever effects nonurban space has on people, their articulations of such effects are shaped by the social environments that taught them to see the world and to engage it and speak of it. Political and folk narratives of preservation were (and are still) infused with theological anthropology and nationalism. "The first man created on earth, according to the ancient Scriptures, was placed by his Creator in a huge natural garden and charged 'to dress it and to keep it,'" President Nixon proclaimed to Congress on April 28, 1971, while attempting to establish new wilderness areas.⁴⁹² Presenting Muir as a New Adam of America's new garden, Nixon continued: "As the great American naturalist John Muir saw it, 'The whole continent was a garden, and from the beginning it seemed to be favored above all the other wild parks and gardens of the globe.'"⁴⁹³ This sentiment is also reflected by the numerous incantations of God,

⁴⁸⁹ Emma Tomlin, *Biodivinity and Biodiversity*, 87.

⁴⁹⁰ William J. Bauer, Jr., *California Through Native Eyes: Reclaiming History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), location 948, 2384,

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Richard Nixon, "Statement on Transmitting to the Congress Proposals To Establish New National Wilderness Areas.," April 28, 1971. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. (<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2991>).

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

Spirit, and religious architecture in environmental and preservationist discourse.⁴⁹⁴ For example, this was true for Muir, as it was for NPS Director, Newton B. Drury, who wrote that “Pride in Americans wells in the hearts of all who look upon the mile-deep chasm of the Grand Canyon”; Drury referenced paleontologist John C. Merriam’s *The Garment of God* to argue his case for conservation.⁴⁹⁵ Drury claimed that visitors could experience the “untamed America that was” because the “National Parks Service is custodian” of both human and natural histories.⁴⁹⁶ This mixing of origin myths (cosmic and national) rhetorically pulled from the authority of church and state, two major sources of hegemony in the United States.

A field of religious discourse developed through the nineteenth-century that, shaped by Christian hegemony, structured power relations between native and colonial traditions, beliefs, and rituals. Religious discourse became a means of expression, but also of protection and cultural survival from colonial oppression. One can see this survival technique in the previously discussed Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990. The *Final Rule and Regulations* of the NAGPRA states that “[sacred objects are those] objects that were devoted to a traditional Native American religious ceremony or ritual and which have religious significance or function in the renewal of such ceremony.”⁴⁹⁷ Moreover, the assumption of scholars and politicians about the generality and universal applicability of the term “God” is also a dynamic of power relations in that specificity becomes flattened by an authority that speaks for a conceptual power (i.e., a god, deity, spirit). American political rhetoric has employed tangential narratives of nonsectarian religious freedom while applying freedom unequally. The Religious Crimes Code

⁴⁹⁴ Kerry Mitchell, *Spirituality & the State: Managing Nature and Experience in America’s National Parks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

⁴⁹⁵ Quoted in Mitchell, *Spirituality & the State*, 28-31.

⁴⁹⁶ Quoted in Mitchell, *Spirituality & the State*, 29-30.

⁴⁹⁷ Greg Johnson, *Sacred Claims: Repatriation and Living Tradition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 97.

of 1883 sought to curb “immorality”⁴⁹⁸ and “barbarous rites and customs,” yet it relied on Christian theological hegemony.⁴⁹⁹ The Code allowed for the official eradication of non-white culture in reservation life by giving the Office of Indian Affairs legal recourse over, for instance, shamanism. Spirits and spirituality are often seen as other iterations of, or stand-ins for, religion. The example above where Young questions a Tlingit about religion, to which he receives a response about spirits, serves to reflect this. Moreover, “spirituality” as it developed within settler society did so under Western ideologies of individualism and humanism, and this affected the politics of spirit and spirituality discourse in North America, culminating in the capitalization of spirituality in settler society.⁵⁰⁰

Spirituality and Strategy

The Tlingit people, with whom Muir had a great deal of contact, serve as an example for looking into cultural differences and spirits and spirituality. The Tlingits did not have a unified system recognizable as *religion*, but rather loose sets of myths and practices tied to spirits, which everything contained. These powerful spirits were either interactive with daily life, or they worked through what anthropologists have labeled “shamans,” or what the Tlingit called *íxt*.⁵⁰¹ Tlingit spirituality centered on the kinship of human and nonhumans and of living and deceased humans in active, reciprocal relationships. Moreover, in contrast to an emphasis on an

⁴⁹⁸ Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom*, 105.

⁴⁹⁹ Wenger, *We Have a Religion*, 39.

⁵⁰⁰ See Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005); Wenger, *We Have a Religion*, 39.

⁵⁰¹ Mary Helen Pelton and Jacqueline DiGennaro, *Images of a People: Tlingit Myths and Legends* (Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, 1992), 19; Kan, *Memory Eternal*, location 1014-1019.

omnipotent, universal deity, authoritative spirits situated in distinct clans (*yéiks*) took local precedence.⁵⁰²

“Spirit” was an intense topic of conversation between Muir and his Tlingit friends, and animal spirits commonly told of in the myths of the Tlingit attracted Muir’s attention. Muir, along with his editor at *The Century Magazine* Robert Underwood Johnson, later edited out parts of Muir’s notes from his published works that attested to the role of white settlers in erasing Tlingit beliefs about the souls of animals.⁵⁰³ Moreover, for the Tlingit the glaciers were easily offended and could bring calamity more than Romantic inspiration, especially when one harmed nonhuman animals for sport.⁵⁰⁴ Both nonhuman animals and glaciers have played important character roles in Tlingit mythology, with the glaciers having more personhood characteristics than they did in Romantic nature discourse. While the concept of the personhood of nonhuman animals pleased him, Muir did not share the same sentiment for glaciers (as the Tlingit had), but rather saw glaciers as a medium of divine communication. The Tlingit cosmology had a system of spirits and souls that had more or less power, whereas Muir’s cosmology was ruled over by a single God whom he experienced through wilderness immersion. The characteristics of cosmological animation (what scholars call animism) differed between the indigenous (Tlingit) and the Romantic Western traveler (Muir, but more generally the settler colonialist).⁵⁰⁵

Muir wrote as a frontier expeditioner. Much like and often within colonial frontier narratives (which represented more of an ideology of colonial expansion than actual geographic

⁵⁰² Nora Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, *Haa Tuwunáagu Yis, for Healing Our Spirit: Tlingit Oratory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 146.

⁵⁰³ Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?: Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014). Kindle location, 3795.

⁵⁰⁴ Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?*, location 3808.

⁵⁰⁵ I mean something similar to Philippe Descola’s work on animism, which defines animism as humans attributing a similar internality in nonhumans as in humans. Philippe Descola, “Beyond Nature and Culture: A Traffic off Souls,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2, no. 1 (2012): 473-500; Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 129.

space), religious discourse served nationalist, ethnic, and colonial projects. Seemingly similar cosmological constructs—cooperative discourses—appeared to create amicable relationships while preservation/conservation efforts chipped away at indigenous sovereignty; this was codified with the 1971 Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act, which shifted power to corporations, effectively weakening native fishing, hunting, and territory rights.⁵⁰⁶ As Frederick Jackson Turner argued in the late nineteenth century, America’s frontier was not just romantic space, it was another form of independence from Europe.⁵⁰⁷ As such, frontier myths served to shape settler society’s national identity. As historian Dorceta Taylor states, “Frontier ideology was rooted in the settler colonial notions of free, cheap, or appropriated land; slave labor; and servile indigenous peoples subjugated for the benefit of European Americans.”⁵⁰⁸ Even if Anglo-Americans such as John Muir were not consciously engaged in slavery and subjugating indigenous peoples, their frontier narratives played central roles in occupying the American West. In many ways, Muir’s literary works, correspondences, and legacy fit well within the American colonial project. Muir was silent on, for example, the legal statutes that restricted indigenous hunting on lands long hunted by local tribes—the 1869 ruling of *Ward v. Race Horse* reversed an earlier ruling by one Judge John Riner that favored treaty rights, established in 1868, over Wyoming laws (Wyoming became a state in 1890)—nor did he mention the shifting and porous boundaries of National Parks and the continued indigenous activities for and struggles with Park sovereignty, such as the traditional basket making practices that became entertainment for Park visitors.⁵⁰⁹ What Muir overlooked was the struggle for presence, making dispossession an historical instead of contemporary (for Muir) event. Muir claimed of the Teton area of

⁵⁰⁶ Thornton, *Being & Place Among the Tlingit*, 117.

⁵⁰⁷ Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement*, Location 6999.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 66-67.

Wyoming, which adjoins the Yellowstone area, that “withdrawal [from public sale to Park status] hurt no one.”⁵¹⁰ This minimized or erased the ongoing presence and struggle of indigenous peoples living in both the Teton and Yellowstone areas, but it did serve Muir’s rhetoric of framing a safe, enjoyable, and spiritual space. After describing the hot springs and their spiritual qualities, Muir went on to say, “No scalping Indians will you see. The Blackfeet and Bannocks that once roamed here are gone; so are the old beaver-catchers, the Coulters and Bridgers, with all their attractive buckskin and romance.”⁵¹¹ Similar to the fashion in which attitudes of disappointment developed in white Park visitors to Yosemite who were looking for the “noble savage” of Victorian novels and travel literature, Muir was disillusioned over the loss of the romanticized Indian from the landscape. The conflict in Muir’s thinking (that Indians were supposed to be both present and absent) was common in white settler recreation culture.

Yellowstone Indian removal initiated the “Indian troubles” of the 1870s and extended into the early twentieth century, operating largely on the objections of Anglo-Americans desiring to enjoy “wilderness,” which they argued that Indians destroyed.⁵¹² This followed a trend in American literature (folk, canonical, and journalistic) that erased indigenous people from wilderness spaces; the irony here is that indigenous people represented wilderness at the same time that they threatened it by being “uncivilized” and unevolved.⁵¹³ Despite Muir’s discontent with civilization, he felt that some indigenous people led lives of “grossness.”⁵¹⁴ “Civilized toilers” (urbanites), Muir wrote, should be envious of “pure water and pure air,” idealizing the aesthetics of indigenous life in the contiguous West.⁵¹⁵ Observing the Mono Indians of the

⁵¹⁰ John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 39.

⁵¹¹ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 51.

⁵¹² Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, 57, 62.

⁵¹³ Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement*, Location 7100; Jean M. O’ Brian, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁵¹⁴ Quoted in Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement*, Location 7156.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

California Mono Desert in 1911 in *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), Muir found himself put off by their appearances: “mostly ugly, and some of them altogether hideous,” and “they seemed to have no right place in the landscape.”⁵¹⁶ Muir found that the “worst thing about them is their uncleanliness. Nothing truly wild is unclean.”⁵¹⁷ This sentiment was shared by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1871 travel partner and author of the travelogue *A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson*, who called the Ute and Shoshones “dirty,” “squalid people.”⁵¹⁸ Muir’s views on indigenous people were complex, but his environmental advocacy overpowered any empathy he had for them, favoring “pure” wilderness over indigenous sovereignty. Yet Muir’s distaste for their appearances was tempered by a recognition of their common humanity; quoting a poem, “A Man’s A Man For A’ That,” by Robert Burns, Muir wrote, “It’s coming yet, for a’ that, that man to man, the world o’er, shall brothers be for a’ that.”⁵¹⁹ And yet, humanizing one’s *other* does not always promote human equality, nor does it negate the colonial imagination.

Muir’s support for military occupation and protection of American wilderness spaces casts a shadow on his melodious musing on the Yosemite’s spiritual qualities: “And when [visitors] are fairly within the mighty walls of the temple and hear the psalms of the falls, they will forget themselves and become devout. Blessed indeed should be every pilgrim in these holy mountains.”⁵²⁰ Muir articulated this in *Our National Parks*, where soldiers guarded “the noblest of God’s trees” and the Teton range in Wyoming, and in his 1911 article in *The Atlantic* (which had published Muir’s notes written in 1869). To be sure, the history of military presence is complex, including the story of the Buffalo Soldiers, “Yosemite’s first park rangers,” and the

⁵¹⁶ Quoted in Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement*, Location 7168.

⁵¹⁷ Quoted in Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement*, Location 7168-7179.

⁵¹⁸ James Bradley Thayer, *A Western Journey with Mr. Emerson* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1884), 40-41.

⁵¹⁹ Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, 295.

⁵²⁰ John Muir, “My First Summer in the Sierra (Part II)”, *The Atlantic Monthly* (9 February 1911) Volume 107, No. 2. (<https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/flashbks/muir/muirfeb.htm>); Muir, *Our National Parks*, 51, 328.

tragic and triumphant story of African-American military history.⁵²¹ Muir journaled about his military friends, though conspicuously left out representing the Buffalo Soldiers:

Bade farewell to my friend [University of Wisconsin professor J.D. Butler] and the General [Benjamin Alvord⁵²²]. The old soldier was very kind, and an interesting talker. He told me long stories of the Florida Seminole war in which he took part, and invited me to visit him in Omaha. Calling Carlo [a friend's St. Bernard], I scrambled home through the Indian Canon gate, rejoicing, pitying the poor Professor and General bound by clocks, almanacs, orders, duties, etc., and compelled to dwell with lowland care and dust and din where Nature is covered and her voice smothered, while the poor insignificant wanderer enjoys the freedom and glory of God's wilderness.⁵²³

Muir waxed eloquent about "God's wilds" and "the Range of Light" and how "poor Professor and General" had to leave, but, writing in 1869 and publishing in 1911, he sees little issue with the acquisition of land in both the Seminole War stories and the Yosemite Valley. Professor Butler invited Muir to accompany him and Alvord on their trip to Hawaii, which had yet to become a U.S. territory and was a site of U.S. colonial scientific activity.⁵²⁴

Galen Clark, the first European to find, guard, and advocate preservation of the Yosemite Valley, made an early notation of a term of derision—"diggers"—that Muir later employed,

⁵²¹ Annette McGivney, "The Living History of Yosemite's Buffalo Soldiers: The Africa-American soldiers who were assigned to protect the Sierra Nevadas became Yosemite's first park rangers," myyosemite.com. (<https://www.myyosemitepark.com/park/buffalo-soldiers>); Frank N. Schubert, *Black Valor: Buffalo Soldiers and the Medal of Honor, 1870-1898* (Lanham, state: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997). As Schubert argues, there are significant issues with the official story of the Buffalo Soldiers that one should be aware of. The origin of the Buffalo Soldier name, their attitudes and relationship with indigenous people, and their role in colonialism (the suppression of the Sioux Ghost dance, for instance) incomplete sentence. (Schubert, 119-121)

⁵²² General Benjamin Alvord was a Civil War commander in the U.S. Army's District of Oregon. A graduate of West Point, Alvord would go on to a two-year appointment at his alma mater in mathematics and natural and experimental philosophy after serving in the Seminole War. Alvord's Oregonian troops also engaged the "Snake War" against the Northern Paiute people. Gregory P. Shine, "Benjamin P. Alvord" (1813-1884), www.oregonencyclopedia.org. (https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/alvord_benjamin/#.W494tyhKjIU).

⁵²³ John Muir, "My First Summer in the Sierra" (Part IV), *The Atlantic Monthly* 107, No. 4 (April, 1911). (<https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/flashbks/muir/muirapr.htm>). Muir wrote that he "sensed" Butler's presence, who had apparently gotten lost in the Valley and initially did not recognize Muir. Muir knew Butler through Jeanne Carr.

⁵²⁴ John Muir, "My First Summer in the Sierra (Part III)", *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1911) Vol 107, No. 3. (<https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/flashbks/muir/muirmar.htm>). Hawaii would have offered Muir abundant botanical opportunities, but it would be Muir's 1903-1904 world botanical circumnavigation that briefly brought his feet to that soil. Michael P. Branch, *John Muir's Last Journey: South to the Amazon and East to Africa* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2001), xxvi.

writing that the “digger Indians” are “generally thought to be the lowest class of Indians in America.”⁵²⁵ Clark, however, notes that their artistic work (for example, basketry) was “superior.”⁵²⁶ Clark’s account is strikingly more sympathetic than Muir’s, blatantly naming Indian raids as “struggles for existence.”⁵²⁷ Muir employed the term “digger Indian” for an indigenous guide in the Yosemite Valley, a term of derogatory connotation for Central Californian Indians.⁵²⁸ Muir also demonstrated his disapproval of the Mono Indians’ appearance:

A strangely dirty and irregular life these dark eyed, dark-haired, half-happy savages lead in this clean wilderness; starvation and abundance, death-like calm, indolence, and admirable indefatigable action succeeding each other in stormy rhythm, like winter and summer. Two things they have that civilized toilers might well envy them -- pure air and pure water. These go far to cover and cure the grossness of their lives.⁵²⁹

Muir must have been aware of the American racial constructions that tied non-whiteness to dirtiness.⁵³⁰ For a man who spent a lot of time mountaineering, working with sheep, and living outdoors, Muir had little problem reinforcing colonial stereotypes. Muir may have held that nature “made the whole world kin,” but apparently kin were separated by cultural and resource practices. Importantly, the supposed egalitarianism of a species did not preclude the organization of bodies within the species to regulate (especially class) behavior. This should be considered when reading Muir describing all of humanity, for instance:

We all flow from one fountain Soul. All are expressions of one Love. God does not appear, and flow out, only from narrow chinks and round bored wells here and there in favored races and places, but He flows in grand undivided currents, shoreless and

⁵²⁵ Galen Clark, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley: Thier [sic] History, Customs and Traditions* (Yosemite Valley, CA: Galen Clark, 1904), 5. Clark self-published this book, hence the spelling error in the title. This might be telling about his social status and his difference in perspective from Muir’s genteel habitus.

⁵²⁶ Clark, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley*, 67.

⁵²⁷ Clark, *Indians of the Yosemite Valley*, 10, 67.

⁵²⁸ Lönnberg, Allan, "The Digger Indian Stereotype in California." *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 3, no. 2 (1981): 215-23.

⁵²⁹ Muir, "My First Summer in the Sierra" (Part IV), *The Atlantic Monthly*. (April 1911).

⁵³⁰ Carl A. Zimring, *Clean and White: A History of Environmental Racism in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

boundless over creeds and forms and all kinds of civilizations and peoples and beasts, saturating all and fountainizing all.⁵³¹

The tension between humanizing and dehumanizing indigenous people in Muir's environmental literature extends beyond his experiences with the Mono people.

Muir first visited Alaska in 1879. Amidst stories of the Tlingit of Alaska, he contrasted them to "the typical American Indian."⁵³² Muir was sure that "[the Alaskan natives] were doubtless derived from Mongol stock."⁵³³ He believed himself to have become familiar with their religion and superstitions.⁵³⁴ Noting how Tlingit people were accepting of missionaries, Muir found that "they are quick to accept the doctrine of the atonement, because they themselves practice it, although to many of the civilized whites it is a stumbling-block and rock of offense." It is uncertain exactly what Christian doctrine of atonement Muir held (if he did at all), but he recalled a Tlingit friend exchanging a story about how the doctrine resonated with Tlingit culture. After a long period of war between the Tlingit and Sitka peoples and close to starvation from being cut off from berry and salmon sources, one of the Tlingit chiefs, Stickeen, confronted a Sitka chief. Asking for an end to the war, the Sitka chief requested that the Tlingit people give ten men, equaling the difference in men killed by the Tlingit. Chief Stickeen offered his own life, instead, as it was "worth ten men."⁵³⁵ According to Muir, when the Tlingit later heard missionaries' story of Christ's atonement, they equated Jesus with Stickeen, surmising that the "Son of God, the Chief of chiefs, the Maker of all the world, must be worth more than all

⁵³¹ Muir, *John Muir to Catherine Merrill*, quoted in Steven J. Holmes, *The Young John Muir*, 238.

⁵³² John Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 197.

⁵³³ Ibid; Antonio Arnaiz-Villena et. al., "The peopling of the Americas: a complex issue for Amerindian, Na-Dene, Aleut and Eskimo first inhabitants," *International Journal of Modern Anthropology*, 1, 3 (2010), 65-79. Muir described the Tlingits: "Their down-slanting oval eyes, wide cheek-bones, and rather thick, outstanding upper lips at once suggest their connection with the Chinese or Japanese. I have not seen a single specimen that looks in the least like the best of the Sioux, or indeed of any of the tribes to the east of the Rocky Mountains. They also differ from other North American Indians in being willing to work, when free from the contamination of bad whites" (197).

⁵³⁴ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 197.

⁵³⁵ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 197-200.

mankind put together; therefore, when His blood was shed, the salvation of the world was made sure.”⁵³⁶ Offering a story about a Chief Shakes, Muir narrated that the chief saw Christianity as superior to Tlingit religion because of the white settlers’ ability to build better ships. Chief Shakes recognized the East Coast intellectual and seminarian culture by calling a missionary “the Boston man.”⁵³⁷ Muir offered evidence that the story of atonement resonated with the Stickeen people:

That chief literally gave himself a sacrifice for his people. He died that they might live. Therefore, when missionaries preached the doctrine of atonement, explaining that when all mankind had gone astray, had broken God's laws and deserved to die, God's son came forward, and, like the Stickeen chief, offered himself as a sacrifice to heal the cause of God's wrath and set all the people of the world free, the doctrine was readily accepted. “Yes, your words are good,” they said.⁵³⁸

Muir wrote that prior to his arrival at Fort Wrangell, Alaska, Chief Shakes resonated with a missionary’s sermon:

When all were assembled, the missionary preached a Christian sermon on the fall of man and the atonement whereby Christ, the Son of God, the Chief of chiefs, had redeemed all mankind, provided that this redemption was voluntarily accepted with repentance of their sins and the keeping of his commandments. When the missionary had finished his sermon, Chief Shakes slowly arose, and, after thanking the missionary for coming so far to bring them good tidings and taking so much unselfish interest in the welfare of his tribe, he advised his people to accept the new religion, for he felt satisfied that because the white man knew so much more than the Indian, the white man’s religion was likely to be better than theirs.⁵³⁹

Muir presents technological prowess as convincing for religious conversion:

“The white man,” [Chief Shakes, head chief of the Stickeens at Fort Wrangell] said, “makes great ships. We, like children, can only make canoes. He makes his big ships go with the wind, and he also makes them go with fire. We chop down trees with stone axes; the Boston man with iron axes, which are far better. In everything the ways of the white man seem to be better than ours. Compared with the white man we are only blind children, knowing not how best to live either here or in the country we go to after we die. So I wish you to learn this new religion and teach it to your children, that you may all go

⁵³⁶ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 200.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 200.

when you die into that good heaven country of the white man and be happy. But I am too old to learn a new religion, and besides, many of my people who have died were bad and foolish people, and if this word the missionary has brought us is true, and I think it is, many of my people must be in that bad country the missionary calls 'Hell,' and I must go there also, for a Stickeen chief never deserts his people in time of trouble. To that bad country, therefore, I will go, and try to cheer my people and help them as best I can to endure their misery."⁵⁴⁰

Sergei Kan argues from missionary ethnohistory that Tlingit acceptance of Christianity became more vocal after 1867 when the Tlingit "began to lose political independence" and to experience a loss of respect and dignity.⁵⁴¹

Muir goes on to tell how a Stickeen tribe member (the name born by both the leader and the tribal group) struck a Taku (another Tlingit subgroup), which required an equal strike for "atonement" (Muir's word).⁵⁴² Feeling that the required blow from his own tribe for atonement was not sufficient, the Taku called for battle. Recalling the example of Christ, Samuel Hall Young and Toyatte tried to stop the conflict. When they were not successful, Toyatte told Samuel Young to get to safety inside a fort. Toyatte went into battle without a weapon, so that his people would not be alone in danger; Muir went on to honor the fallen hero.⁵⁴³ Muir found nobility in Toyatte's behaviors similar to the Victorian genteel Christian qualities of the "Boston men." Religion-making between Tlingit traditions and Christian religious discourse was a means of status-making in a colonial context. Muir recognized this:

Toyatte was a famous orator. I was present at the meeting at Fort Wrangell at which he was examined and admitted as a member of the Presbyterian Church. When called upon to answer the questions as to his ideas of God, and the principal doctrines of Christianity,

⁵⁴⁰ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 200-201.

⁵⁴¹ Sergei Kan, *Memory Eternal*, location 514-520.

⁵⁴² Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 202-203.

⁵⁴³ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 203. "At the first fire Toyatte fell, shot through the breast. Thus, died for his people the noblest old Roman of them all. On this first Alaska excursion I saw Toyatte under all circumstances, — in rain and snow, landing at night in dark storms, making fires, building shelters, exposed to all kinds of discomfort, but never under any circumstances did I ever see him do anything, or make a single gesture, that was not dignified, or hear him say a word that might not be uttered anywhere. He often deplored the fact that he had no son to take his name at his death and expressed himself as very grateful when I told him that his name would not be forgotten, — that I had named one of the Stickeen glaciers for him."

he slowly arose in the crowded audience, while the missionary said, "Toyatte, you do not need to rise. You can answer the questions seated." To this he paid no attention, but stood several minutes without speaking a word, never for a moment thinking of sitting down like a tired woman while making the most important of all the speeches of his life. He then explained in detail what his mother had taught him as to the character of God, the great Maker of the world; also what the shamans had taught him; the thoughts that often came to his mind when he was alone on hunting expeditions, and what he first thought of the religion which the missionaries had brought them. In all his gestures, and in the language in which he expressed himself, there was a noble simplicity and earnestness and majestic bearing which made the sermons and behavior of the three distinguished divinity doctors present seem commonplace in comparison.⁵⁴⁴

Christianity was, here, a frame to make sense of local experiences as well as to negotiate power relations. Muir's finding nobility in the behaviors of the Tlingit, however, reflects his determination of their worth based on their mirroring of his vision of nature and genteel habitus, in the vein of progressive genteel nature writers (Emerson, Thoreau, and Sampson Reed). Muir would write about Tlingit religion,

I greatly enjoyed the Indian's 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 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 minister 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 and most favorable time of the year. I inquired how it was that with enemies so wise and powerful the deer were not all killed. [My friend] Kadachan replied that wolves knew better than to kill them all and thus cut off their most important food-supply.⁵⁴⁵

Muir advocated and ennobled indigenous tribes that accorded with his anti-anthropocentric vision of religion, challenging the notion that humans are the only spiritual and thus truly living beings worthy of ethical consideration.

⁵⁴⁴ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 201-202.

⁵⁴⁵ Muir, *Travel in Alaska*, 123-124.

Muir represented his Alaskan native friends in mostly positive ways, but his work on the mainland National Parks is a different story. For President Theodore Roosevelt (Muir's friend and political backer), capitalist expansion was the only legitimate understanding of ownership; indigenous nomadism illegitimated land ownership.⁵⁴⁶ Despite Muir's idea in *Our National Parks* that humans came from the woods, his critique of industrialism and commercialism retained settler capitalist ideas of land ownership in which individuals (mainly white males) could own property and stake claims on territory in ways that nomadic people did not practice. Despite Muir's disdain for commercialism and industrialism, he believed that a strong work ethic was a measure for nobility.⁵⁴⁷ The semi-nomadic ways of, for instance, the Mono Indians of the Sierra Nevada instead represented the idleness and uncleanliness that made indigenous peoples unfit for the landscape in Muir's mind.

Religion and Muir's Yosemite

Any reader of Muir's work on what have become the National Parks or of Muir's environmental rhetoric may quickly recognize that religiously inflected language is definitive of Muir's style. Muir enchanted and sacralized landscapes, experiences, and objects within his wilderness writings. In doing so, he downplayed the history of dispossession and colonialism that provided those spaces for Americans to "play in and pray in," as Muir stated in *The Yosemite*:

The making of gardens and parks goes on with civilization all over the world, and they increase both in size and number as their value is recognized. Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike. This natural beauty-hunger is made manifest in the little window-sill gardens of the poor, though perhaps only a geranium slip in a broken cup, as well as in the carefully tended rose and lily gardens of the rich, the thousands of spacious

⁵⁴⁶ Taylor, *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement*, Location 7190.

⁵⁴⁷ Muir, *Travels in Alaska*, 197.

city parks and botanical gardens, and in our magnificent National parks — the Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, etc. — Nature’s sublime wonderlands, the admiration and joy of the world.⁵⁴⁸

It was convenient for Muir to turn back to a positive use of civilization, here, with a nationalist sentiment that he was trying to touch on. The “gardens and parks” that he spoke of were spaces of national identity, high culture, and cultural refinement dating back to at least the Roman Empire. The cultivation of and mastery (whether in commodification or knowledge construction) over nature was a powerful narrative that Euro-Americans inherited from the Roman Empire. Muir used France as an example of forest management and civilization, which is interesting because France believed itself to be the inheritors of the Roman Empire, justifying its African colonial campaigns through literature of “environmental imagination.”⁵⁴⁹ The “National Park” idea served to “civilize,” “territorialize,” and “classify” nature into national mythologies.⁵⁵⁰

In his book, *The Yosemite*, Muir compared Yosemite to the temple in Jerusalem, which functioned rhetorically to highlight Jesus’s objection to a place of prayer being turned into a place of commerce.⁵⁵¹ He compared United States senators to Satan for their commercialism. However, Muir himself was not removed from the system of industrialism and commerce; Muir was friends with barons of industry, and he himself was involved in agricultural development.

⁵⁴⁸ Muir, *The Yosemite*, 256-257.

⁵⁴⁹ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 337; Diana K. Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

⁵⁵⁰ Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, Patrick Kupper, “Introduction: Towards a Global History of National Parks,” *Civilizing Nature: National Parks in Global Historical Perspective*, ed. Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, and Patrick Kupper (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 2.

⁵⁵¹ Muir, *The Yosemite*, 257. “Nevertheless, like anything else worthwhile, from the very beginning, however well-guarded, [‘Nature’s sublime wonderlands’ (256)] have always been subject to attack by despoiling gain-seekers and mischief-makers of every degree from Satan to Senators, eagerly trying to make everything immediately and selfishly commercial, with schemes disguised in smug-smiling philanthropy, industriously, shampiously crying, ‘Conservation, conservation, panutilization,’ that man and beast may be fed and the dear Nation made great. Thus, long ago a few enterprising merchants utilized the Jerusalem temple as a place of business instead of a place of prayer, changing money, buying and selling cattle and sheep and doves; and earlier still, the first forest reservation, including only one tree, was likewise de spoiled. Ever since the establishment of the Yosemite National Park, strife has been going on around its borders and I suppose this will go on as part of the universal battle between right and wrong, however much its boundaries may be shorn, or its wild beauty destroyed.”

He was not writing primarily to indigenous publics, but rather to Anglo-American citizens who needed motivation to support the preservation movement. As such, the possibilities of the use of Muir's writing America for the many politicians who would conjure the memory and words of Muir for their own projects were many. Muir was place-making for citizens of particular means under the rhetoric of basic human needs for beauty and spirituality in nature: "Everyone needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to body and soul alike."⁵⁵² Muir thought that the need for nature was so ingrained into the human condition that ownership of house plants ("window sill gardens") by people in poverty was evidence of this. But respite from city life for any social class was only part of the environmental discourse. Resource extraction would reshape the Hetch-Hetchy Valley, and the environmental impact to the valley was devastating.

Muir's diatribe against commercialism in his fight to preserve the California Hetch-Hetchy Valley from utilitarian use—building a dam to provide water for the San Francisco area—is famously mystifyingly poetic:

These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar. Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man.⁵⁵³

Hetch-Hetchy Valley was valuable for many reasons to many groups. The Central Miwok Indians found summer respite and sustenance in the area; artists such as William Keith and Albert Bierstadt found inspiration there; but it would be loggers, miners, sheepherders, and industrialists who saw the development potential in the valley that ultimately threatened its

⁵⁵² Muir, *The Yosemite*, 256.

⁵⁵³ Muir, *The Yosemite*, 262.

ecosystem, fundamentally altering the landscape.⁵⁵⁴ Muir's 'God of the mountains' was not that of the local Paiute, Mono, Ahwahnechee or Miwok traditions. Where Muir did write about United States government officials' conflicts with and dispossession of indigenous peoples, Muir's words primarily served to defend the calmness and safety of the Valley. In a section of *The Yosemite* entitled "Early History of the Valley," Muir strikingly frames this history:

In the wild gold years of 1849 and '50, the Indian tribes along the western Sierra foothills became alarmed at the sudden invasion of their acorn orchard and game fields by miners, and soon began to make war upon them, in their usual murdering, plundering style. This continued until the United States Indian Commissioners succeeded in gathering them into reservations, some peacefully, others by burning their villages and stores of food. The Yosemite or Grizzly Bear tribe, fancying themselves secure in their deep mountain stronghold, were the most troublesome and defiant of all, and it was while the Mariposa battalion, under command of Major Savage, was trying to capture this warlike tribe and conduct them to the Fresno reservation that their deep mountain home, the Yosemite Valley, was discovered.⁵⁵⁵

In Muir's description of conflict between Major Savage and Tenaya the chief of "the Grizzlies" (i.e., Yosemite people), he quoted Tenaya using a term popular with indigenous people in the 1880s to refer to the president of the United States: the Great Father.⁵⁵⁶ The Yosemite people want nothing from The Great Father, Muir recorded Tenaya as saying, because they have a Great Spirit who provides for them, yet the Great Father is "so good and rich."⁵⁵⁷ Muir's brief history of the Yosemite Valley made for a distancing of occupation and indigenous presence, by emphasizing the aesthetic characteristics over the continued struggle and politics of indigenous presence. Moreover, Muir wrote in *The Yosemite* about murdered miners and their conflicts with indigenous people, conflicts that ultimately resulted in the murder of Chief

⁵⁵⁴ Robert W. Righter, *The Battle over Hetch-Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford, 2005), location 289, 358, 507-510.

⁵⁵⁵ Muir, *The Yosemite*, 226.

⁵⁵⁶ Muir, *The Yosemite*, 227-228. Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press: 1984), xxviii.

⁵⁵⁷ Muir, *The Yosemite*, 227.

Tenaya.⁵⁵⁸ Muir continued the myth of American innocence in settler/indigenous relations. He jumped ahead in his history to the story of white people settling in Yosemite because of the need for improved visitor conditions at the hotel.⁵⁵⁹ This narrative style has functioned as a sort of apologia rhetoric, an image repair rhetoric to protect settlers' image from the identity of occupier. Muir used this tactic, as did many settler colonialists, when he described the Modoc War in southern Oregon; this restructured the image of settlers as victims instead of invaders.⁵⁶⁰ Different iterations of divine presence and national sovereignty have informed American land acquisition as well as American settler innocence.

The Big Trees: Muir's Prized Sequoias and the Enchanting of a Nation

It is appropriate that this chapter ends with Muir's greatest legacy: the giant trees (mainly the Giant Sequoias, Coastal Redwoods, and Douglas Firs). Once governor of Oregon and "don of American trees" Charles Sprague, remembering Muir in the Sierra Club Bulletin in 1916, stated the following: "Few men whom I have known love trees as deeply and intelligently as John Muir."⁵⁶¹ Muir's first major article, entitled "God's First Temples: How Shall We Preserve Our Forests," was an allusion to the first line of poet and journalist William Cullen Bryant's poem, "The Forest Hymn."⁵⁶² What was said of Bryant by his biographer, Andrew James Symington, in 1880 could have been said of Muir: "When he communes with Nature in America, it is distinctively American Nature."⁵⁶³ Muir spilled a great deal of ink describing the giant trees. His

⁵⁵⁸ Muir, *The Yosemite*, 232-233.

⁵⁵⁹ Muir, *The Yosemite*, 234-236.

⁵⁶⁰ Boyd Cothran, *Remembering the Modoc War: Redemptive Violence and the Making of American Innocence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Muir, *Steep Trails*, 41-43.

⁵⁶¹ Eric Rutkow, *American Canopy*, 148.

⁵⁶² Eric Rutkow, *American Canopy*, 149.

⁵⁶³ Andrew James Symington, *William Cullen Bryant: A Biographical Sketch: With Selections from His Poems and Other Writings* (New York: Harper & Brothers: 1880), 228.

environmental rhetoric often centered on the sequoia, and in many ways saving it was his first major environmental battle. Fighting off the onslaught of industrialists, Muir and his ilk had to rely on a rhetorical tactic that labeled many of the protected lands, such as the Yellowstone area, as “worthless” for capitalist endeavors but not for public recreational and spiritual ones.⁵⁶⁴ Capitalist ideologies of land ownership and utility, which turned all matter into potential capital, necessitated the definition of land and its worth; Muir had to find another rhetorical tactic to re-describe the value of land. In an address to the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s August 1876 meeting, Muir decried the wasteful use of “big tree lumber,” as well as (and more pressingly) the destruction caused by sheep and their “sheepman” in the areas in which the *Sequoia Gigantea* grew.⁵⁶⁵ Muir would condemn the burning of underbrush by Indians for the sake of deer hunting, tangentially threatening the big trees that were “rapidly vanishing before the fire and steel of man.”⁵⁶⁶ However, this practice of burning actually increased biodiversity and food sources for the Western California Indians, such as the Mono.⁵⁶⁷ Muir overlooking the benefits of indigenous forestry practices provided the opportunity to mythologize trees of great size for great Euro-American cultural significance. Muir argued that the preservation of such “wonders and beauty” fit in relationship with Western theological traditions, as they revealed God’s glory. This rhetoric has confounded scholars as to how Muir’s religion fits into categories of comparative religions, yet it nonetheless played on the discursive

⁵⁶⁴ Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 4th ed. (Lanham, MD: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2010), 52-53.

⁵⁶⁵ John Muir, *On the Post-Glacial History of the Sequoia Gigantea*, Proceedings from the American Association for the Advancement of Science Buffalo Meeting, August 1876, pp.14.

⁵⁶⁶ Muir, “On the Post-Glacial History of the Sequoia Gigantea,” 14-15.

⁵⁶⁷ M. Kat Anderson, *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge of California’s Resources* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 137. Anderson does not note Muir’s negative appraisal of this practice, however.

field of American theological hegemony, employing Christian theological language. Muir used language that was intelligible to the enculturation of Americans through religious discourse:

“Conservation, conservation, panutilization,” that man and beast may be fed and the dear Nation made great. Thus long ago a few enterprising merchants utilized the Jerusalem temple as a place of business instead of a place of prayer, changing money, buying and selling cattle and sheep and doves; and earlier still, the first forest reservation, including only one tree, was likewise de spoiled. Ever since the establishment of the Yosemite National Park, strife has been going on around its borders and I suppose this will go on as part of the universal battle between right and wrong, however much its boundaries may be shorn, or its wild beauty destroyed.⁵⁶⁸

Muir wrote in his journal that “in God’s wildness lies the hope of the world—the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness.”⁵⁶⁹ Muir echoed Henry David Thoreau, conjuring Thoreau’s cultural authority.⁵⁷⁰ Muir espoused knowledge of genteel literature, presenting cultural capital, and operating in the field of American (and transatlantic) religious discourse that blurred the lines between liberal Protestantism, Unitarianism, Romanticism, and Transcendentalism.

As demonstrated earlier in this thesis, Muir’s social circle consisted of evolutionary scientists (Asa Gray, Joseph LeConte, and Louis Agassiz) who offered theories of evolution that placed white people at the top of the evolutionary chain, while allowing for the humanity of “lesser races.”⁵⁷¹ The hegemonies of American scientific discourse on race in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries affected how Americans understood both race and class in an evolutionary frame. Muir likened Emerson to the Giant Sequoia (“‘You are yourself a Giant Sequoia.’ [Muir] said. ‘Stop and get acquainted with your big brethren.’”),⁵⁷² which Muir,

⁵⁶⁸ Muir, *The Yosemite*, 257.

⁵⁶⁹ John Muir, quoted in Worster, *A Passion for Nature*, 319. Worster records this from Muir’s Alaska journals. “Unredeemed” may be a commercial term, not a theological one, as it follows a botanical, agricultural word. It may also intentionally and rhetorically be operating with both commercial and theological meanings.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷¹ Christopher Irmscher, *Louis Agassiz: Creator of American Science* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 262-269.

⁵⁷² John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 135.

quoting British botanist Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, called “the noblest of a noble race.”⁵⁷³

Hooker reflected class and racial categorical parallels with plants and people: “There were also noble plants of Falconeri, Aucklandii, argenteum, barbatum and others—together with Hodgsoni forming regular shrubberies, as if natives of the soil.”⁵⁷⁴ Regarding nobility and race, Muir believed that his vision of nature philosophy was, in fact, fit for “Boston men,” despite what he understood Emerson’s traveling party to believe.⁵⁷⁵ Muir wrote,

[Emerson’s] party, full of indoor philosophy, failed to see the natural beauty and fullness of promise of my wild plan [of camping in the wilderness instead of sleeping in a hotel], 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. Anyhow, they would have none of it, and held Mr. Emerson to the hotels and trails.⁵⁷⁶

Emerson would name one of the trees after an Algonquin chief who first made contact with the English who established Plymouth Colony in 1620: Samoset.⁵⁷⁷ The line between honor and patronization has been a blurry one in the settler appropriation of indigenous names.

Muir’s amazement at the sequoia directed his pen like he was a novelist, “silent and awestricken, as if in the presence of superior beings new arrived from some other star, so calm and bright and godlike they are.” Muir made frequent use of religious imagery in describing their form: “the noble shafts faithfully upright like the pillars of temples, upholding a roof of infinite leafy inter lacing arches and fretted skylights.”⁵⁷⁸ He frequently described wilderness spaces, like those in which the giant sequoias rose to the sky, as akin to temples and churches, pulling from the emotional registers of his readers who could choose whether they wanted his imagery to be

⁵⁷³ John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 131.

⁵⁷⁴ Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, *Life and Letters of Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker O.M., G.C.S.I.: Based on Material Collected and Arranged by Lady Hooker*, ed. Leonard Huxley (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1918), 343.

⁵⁷⁵ John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 134. Muir: “And to think of this being a Boston choice! Sad commentary on culture and the glorious transcendentalism.”

⁵⁷⁶ John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 132.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid*,

⁵⁷⁸ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 98.

literal or ludic. The sequoias, strategically employed, represented the grandeur of Muir's wilderness, the nation's role in protecting it, and its vulnerability, too: "God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling tempests and floods; but he cannot save them from fools, — only Uncle Sam can do that."⁵⁷⁹

Muir's quote from an unattributed source framed his giant sequoias with religion-making poetry:

Saw the light that shone
On Mahomet's uplifted crescent,
On many a royal gilded throne
And deed forgotten in the present,
. . . saw the age of sacred trees
And Druid groves and mystic larches,
And saw from forest domes like these
The builder bring his Gothic arches.⁵⁸⁰

Muir then claimed that the sequoia "used to be venerated as sacred monuments and halls of council and worship. But soon after the discovery of the Calaveras grove [of sequoia trees], one of the grandest trees was cut down for the sake of a stump!"⁵⁸¹ Muir treated capitalism like theologians treated sin: something to be continuously fought but never overcome in this life. He once wrote that "nothing is safe that is dollarable."⁵⁸² He resigned himself to the idea that the economic order was to be kept in check, but ultimately it was a part of "man's" fall.

By making particular objects and areas sacred, Muir reimagined their worth, and the worth of entire areas, as a part of the only major field competitive with economics: religion.⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁹ Muir, *Our National Park*, 365.

⁵⁸⁰ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 279.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² John Muir, "Hetch Hetchy Damming Scheme," memorandum from Johan Muir, President of the Sierra Club, received May 14, 1908, by J. Horace McFarland, President, American Civic Association; Robert Underwood Johnson to John Muir, May 23, 1908, quoted in Robert W. Righter, *The Battle over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism* (New York: Oxford, 2005), Kindle Locations 1105, cf. 3565.

⁵⁸³ I prefer considering "religion" as a field of discourse and power, following Bourdieu's theories of *field* and *religious capital*.

Religious nationalist language created a mythology that bolstered support for an expanding empire; this empire required steady and stable acquisition of resources. Genteel literature contributed much to the Romantic critique of industrialism and commercialism in the late Victorian era. An observer today might find this critique ironic, as industry titans such as steel magnate Andrew Carnegie and Borax company owner—and eventual director of the National Park Service—Steven Mather participated in expansive preservation and conservation efforts.⁵⁸⁴

Concerns over environmental degradation were not solely had by Protestants, and surely not solely by non-Trinitarians such as Universalists or Unitarians; at the turn of the twentieth century the Roman Catholic bishop of Peoria, Illinois, the Rt. Rev. J. L. Spalding, wrote about the degradation of the environment and thought that “industrialism, though not necessarily materialistic, fosters a distrust of spiritual values.”⁵⁸⁵ Genteel literature helped bridge some gaps between denominational divides. Muir contributed to the critiques of commercialism and capitalism within hegemonic religious identity (Christian, in its widest iterations, for all who self-understood or identified as such), building a rhetoric that claimed authority over earthly, material things. For whom that was convincing or compelling, Muir’s rhetorical, philosophical,

⁵⁸⁴ Borax was mined in California. Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, 31.

⁵⁸⁵ The Rt. Rev. John Lancaster Spalding, *Religion and Art and Other Essays* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1905), 195. Spalding also made heavy use of Emerson. Spalding’s warning would have surely struck a chord with Muir: “Faith lies at the root of modern civilization. It is the vital principal of the Christian home and the Christian church; and if the State and School organize themselves on a purely secular and or utilitarian basis, our social and political life will undergo a radical change. We may increase our commercial efficiency; may so manipulate the natural resources of our continent that the markets of the world shall pay tribute to us; we may heighten the level of intelligence and raise the standard of living for the multitude; but little by little we shall lose the power to believe in the absolute worth of truth and goodness and beauty, of justice and purity and love. We shall become the richest of nations, but shall have no supreme men and women. The poet’s vision, the saint’s rapture, and the patriot’s lofty mind will be impossible. Existence will cease to have for us a spiritual content, and we shall come to hold that a man’s life consists in the abundance of the things he possesses, and not in the faith, hope, and righteousness which make him a child of God and a dweller in eternal worlds.” (111) Spalding had early in the book claimed that “Nature’s universal unfolding of herself in higher forms is her cry to God, her hunger for the infinite; the all-pervading tremor and vibration of matter, in heat, in light, in electricity, in the clinging of atom to atom, of body to body, of planet to planet, is the thrill and ecstasy of a world half conscious of the divine presence.” (12) Spalding argued that art, like religion, “appeals from time to eternity, from apparent to real, from man to God. In its light we behold the transcendent beauty of heroic and noble life.”

and ideological approach presented the duties of a nation that largely claimed that its expansion was not only divinely buttressed, but also ethically responsible. This “civilizing mission” attempted to refine social behaviors and form religious discipline, as this was seen to be the culmination of human development. Religious discourse operated as a “technology of power” in Foucault’s terminology, and a “language of persuasion” in Gramscian terms.⁵⁸⁶ The disciplining of behavioral expectations—such as the federal repression of indigenous dancing, language usage, and indigenous medicines—was shaped by a heavily Protestant, monotheistic, and Anglo-theological hegemony of East Coast seminaries. Cultural production, not just art, but literature, education, and nationalist folklore, constituted the hegemonic structuring of “America the beautiful.” The “American spirit” was given life through discourses of American cultural production. Muir made sure to nationalize his enchantment of wilderness. Ending his book *Our National Parks*, Muir called upon “Uncle Sam” to protect the most noble of trees by appealing to their lifespan.⁵⁸⁷

In Muir’s posthumously published journals there is a passage that is an almost exact copy of what he wrote in the above passage, with one crucial change. In his journal Muir wrote, “But [God] cannot save them from sawmills and fools; this is left to the American people!”⁵⁸⁸ Muir seemed to shift his focus from a popular, folk initiative in his journal to a government initiative in *Our National Parks*. Muir constructed a rhetoric that compelled a nation to see the

⁵⁸⁶ Jeremy Carrette, *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporeality and Political Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 32; Grelle, *Antonio Gramsci and the Question of Religion*, 4, 73-4.

⁵⁸⁷ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 364-365. “It took more than three thousand years to make some of the trees in these Western woods, — trees that are still standing in perfect strength and beauty, waving and singing in the mighty forests of the Sierra. Through all the wonderful, eventful centuries since Christ’s time — and long before that — God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand straining, leveling tempests and floods; but he cannot save them from fools, — only Uncle Sam can do that.”

⁵⁸⁸ Wolfe claims this to have been written around 1900. John Muir, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*, ed. Linnie Marsh Wolfe (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 431.

enchantment of its nonurban spaces under the provision and direction of a God who fit the largest frame of authoritative theological discourse.

American genteel Romantic poet James Russell Lowell stated that “the poet is he who can best see and say what is ideal—what belongs to the world of soul and beauty,” and “whether he celebrate the brave and good man, or the gods, or the beautiful as it appears in man or nature, something of a religious character still clings to him; he is the revealer of Deity.”⁵⁸⁹ Muir was an intellectual and wilderness poet of American genteel social influence as it spread across the vastness of the American west composed of yet to be urbanized or commercialized spaces. It was not just one thing that made Muir America’s intellectual and wilderness poet, weaving words into a popular conception of nature and nation; it was not just that he could quote and exegete the Bible, or that he could drop lines from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow or William Wordsworth or Robert Burns; it was not just that Emerson thought that Muir exceeded Thoreau, or that Thoreau’s son wanted Muir to edit his father’s work; it was not just that Muir found himself becoming the next scientist Alexander von Humboldt or Scottish botanist David Douglas; it was not even Muir’s technological, scientific, and practical knowledge and prowess; it was, rather, Muir strategically performing a myriad of skills inherent to genteel intellectual culture for the sake of creating a mythology of American wilderness.

Muir created a mosaic from the authoritative pieces of American cultural politics to produce the spaces that Americans found meaningful in re-creating themselves and their nation. He fashioned a myth of American wilderness exceptionalism that Americans could understand and respond to, but he did so within the project of settler colonial conquest. Muir designed a conception of the world that challenged anthropocentrism. But wilderness recreation benefited

⁵⁸⁹ James Russell Lowell, *The Function of the Poet and Other Essays* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 8-9.

some classes (white, middle- to upper-classes) much more than others (people of color, indigenous Americans, lower socio-economic class).

CONCLUSION: AMERICAN RELIGION-MAKING AND THE MAKING OF A NATURAL NATION: A CONSIDERATION FROM THE LIFE OF JOHN MUIR

Muir wrote of the wonders of the wilderness, he fought for the protection of the pristine, and he made myths of American awe manifest. One can venture into almost any national preservation space and find Muir's likeness and words gracing the walls and plaques on their infrastructure. The Muir who left us mountains of letters, articles, and books mythologizing the American landscape has himself become mythologized. Presidents and poets, artists and actors, mountain climbers and ministers, and pagans and preservationists have all been inspired by the words of Muir, which have influenced their conceptions of the world. John Muir's likeness even became immortalized on United States currency and postal stamps. Muir's history is inseparable from America's history. Muir would have us believe that we might find the very texts of God's handwritten history within the geology of Yellowstone National Park.⁵⁹⁰ Whatever Muir truly believed, he made people believe in the worth of getting out of the city and protecting the mythological spaces and objects of American wilderness. To whatever extent Muir's wilderness gospel may have fallen short of the reality of "wilderness" (including the erasure of indigenous relationships to and meanings of the land), Muir influenced America's powerful citizens' belief in his gospel. President Theodore Roosevelt, a close friend of Muir, commented before an audience at the state capitol building in Sacramento, California, in 1903,

As regards some of the trees, I want them preserved because they are the only things of their kind in the world. Lying out at night under those giant Sequoias was lying in a temple built by no hand of man, a temple grander than any human architect could by any

⁵⁹⁰ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 59.

possibility build, and I hope for the preservation of the groves of giant trees simply because it would be a shame to our civilization to let them disappear.⁵⁹¹

Muir passed away eleven years later on December 24, 1914, at the age of seventy-six. Roosevelt would eulogize his friend the following month, testifying to the close relationship that they had as well as to Muir's cultural importance:

He was a great factor in influencing the thought of California and the thought of the entire country so as to secure the preservation of those great natural phenomena—wonderful canyons, giant trees, slopes of flower-spangled hillsides which make California a veritable Garden of the Lord. . . . John Muir talked even better than he wrote. His greatest influence was always upon those who were brought into personal contact with him. But he wrote well, and while his books have not the peculiar charm that a very, very few other writers on similar subjects have had, they will nevertheless last long. Our generation owes much to John Muir.⁵⁹²

Roosevelt was not the only president to call upon the cultural authority of John Muir. In 1947, President Truman's dedication of the Everglades National Park demonstrates the National Park System's impact on the structure of civil religion semiotics. Truman connected the "idealism of the American people," the "national shrines" included in the park system, nature, and its protection "for conservation of the human spirit," all in the Everglades National Park.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹¹ Theodore Roosevelt: "Address at the Capitol Building in Sacramento, California," May 19, 1903. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=97748>.

⁵⁹² This was a tribute by Roosevelt to Muir that was originally published in the *Outlook*, vol. 109, pp. 27-28, January 16, 1915, reprinted on the Sierra Clubs website, http://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/life/appreciation_by_roosevelt.aspx.

⁵⁹³ Harry S. Truman: "Address on Conservation at the Dedication of Everglades National Park," December 6, 1947. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. "Our national park system is a dear expression of the idealism of the American people. Without regard for sectional rivalries or for party politics, the Nation has advanced constantly in the last 75 years in the protection of its natural beauties and wonders... Our park system also embraces such national shrines as Jamestown Island, the Statue of Liberty, and the battlefields of Yorktown and Gettysburg. These historic places--as much as the scenic areas--also need to be protected with all the devotion at our command in these days when we are learning again the importance of an understanding loyalty to our national heritage... For conservation of the human spirit, we need places such as Everglades National Park where we may be more keenly aware of our Creator's infinitely varied, infinitely beautiful, and infinitely bountiful handiwork. Here we may draw strength and peace of mind from our surroundings." <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=12798>.

“Thousands of God’s wild blessings will search you and soak you as if you were a sponge, and the big days will go by uncounted,” Muir wrote.⁵⁹⁴ This nature theology would authorize environmental legislature beyond Muir’s lifetime. When signing a conservation bill in 1966, Lyndon B. Johnson highlighted Muir as an American who “saw that America could be great only as long as Americans could commune with the land. [He was one of] the architects of American conservation. . . . The bills that I will now sign help enrich the spirit of America. These acts of Congress help assure that this land of ours—this gift that is outright from God—shall be the most precious legacy that we leave.”⁵⁹⁵

The mythological Muir was called upon by presidents with less than stellar ecological records. President Richard Nixon, in a statement to Congress proposing national wilderness areas, delivered strong religious rhetoric:

Keeping, as well as dressing, the land is an especially important responsibility for us as Americans, for our country was in time past especially endowed with wilderness. As the great American naturalist John Muir saw it, “The whole continent was a garden, and from the beginning it seemed to be favored above all the other wild parks and gardens of the globe. . . .” The inventory of wildness to which John Muir had referred 63 years before thus became part of the law of the land.⁵⁹⁶

In 1972, President Nixon proposed before congress the expansion of numerous wilderness areas,⁵⁹⁷ stating, “The first man on earth, according to the scriptures was placed in a natural

⁵⁹⁴ Muir, *Our National Parks*, 17.

⁵⁹⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson: "Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for Seven Conservation Bills," October 15, 1966. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=27929>.

⁵⁹⁶ Richard Nixon: "Statement on Transmitting to the Congress Proposals to Establish New National Wilderness Areas." April 28, 1971. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2991>.

⁵⁹⁷ Nixon proposed “My new proposals would add to the National Wilderness Preservation System land in the following locations: Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, and Farallon National Wildlife Refuge, California; North Cascades National Park and adjacent recreation areas, Washington; Isle Royale National Park, Michigan; Shenandoah National Park, Virginia; Chamisso National Wildlife Refuge, Simeon of National Wildlife Refuge, and Izembek National Wildlife Range and Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska; West Sister Island National Wildlife Refuge, Ohio; Breton National Wildlife Refuge, Louisiana; Florida Keys National Wildlife Refuge, Florida; and Cedar Breaks National Monument, Arches National Monument, and Capitol Reef National Monument, Utah. I am also recommending an amendment to the wilderness proposal for the Okefenokee National

garden, and he was charged 'to dress it and keep it.' Nixon repeated, here, the Muir saying from the above quote.

President Gerald Ford used Muir's words to promote the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as a response to an ecological religious responsibility: "The great naturalist, John Muir, once said of our Nation's forests: 'The forests of America, however slighted by man, must have been a great delight to God; for they were the best He ever planted.' This act proves that Americans intend never again to slight our forests."⁵⁹⁸

A particularly acute piece of presidential rhetoric regarding Muir and American mythology comes from Ronald Reagan. On April 11, 1988, Reagan proclaimed April 21 John Muir's birthday, National John Muir Day. Earth Day and John Muir day are one and the same. Reagan stated,

The establishment of our tremendous national park system, and the practice of sound conservation policies by industry, government, and private citizens, owe much to this pioneer . . . who wrote, "The forests of America, however slighted by man, must have been a great delight to God; for they were the finest He ever created." . . . Let all who revere America's natural heritage, and see in it a timeless treasure dependent upon our stewardship, pause on April 21 in grateful remembrance of John Muir, a man who forever expressed his credo in the words, "In God's wildness lies the hope of the world . . ." . . . *Now, Therefore, I, Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim April 21, 1988, as John Muir Day, and I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.*⁵⁹⁹

Wildlife Refuge in Georgia, first submitted to the 90th Congress, so that it would take in 347,000 acres rather than the 319,000 acres originally proposed." Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Richard Nixon: "Message to the Congress Proposing Establishment of New National Wilderness Areas." September 21, 1972. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3585>. Last accessed, 3/29/2015; Gerald R. Ford: "Statement on Signing the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974.," August 17, 1974. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=4443>. Last accessed, 3/29/2015.

⁵⁹⁹ Ronald Reagan: "Proclamation 5794 - John Muir Day, 1988," April 11, 1988. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=35663>. Last accessed, 3/29/2015. Reagan made sure to note that Muir traveled to "many other lands" during his active lifetime. Implying he had something to compare America to.

President Bill Clinton spoke of Muir as a “Father of our National Park System” who was inspired by our “Nation’s wondrous national treasures” so that “he became the driving force behind the creation of . . . National Parks.”⁶⁰⁰ President Clinton proclaimed April 19-25 National Park Week in 1999. When Clinton signed the Giant Sequoia National Monument into being, he located Muir as integrating a religious dynamic into Americans’ propensity to pilgrimage to the parks. The president coined the National Parks and the nation’s natural resources as a unifying space that crossed party lines:

Americans will come here to do all these things, and these majestic trees will continue, as John Muir said, to “preach God’s forestry fresh from heaven.” . . . Now, before I sign the proclamation, let me just remind you that for over 100 years . . . Americans have sought to save these giant sequoias. Earth Day brought groups of Americans together on a crusade to save the treasures of our planet.⁶⁰¹

But this Muir, who mythologized American wilderness and has, in turn, become mythologized, has also contributed to an environmental movement that is characterized by racial, economic, and colonial domination. Muir was firmly in the hegemonic space of the genteel class, including American anti-denominational Christian theism, Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, and religious nationalism. If the unsuccessful battle for Hetch-Hetchy Valley’s preservation brought the young environmental movement to widespread attention, the dispossession of indigenous lands and the indigenous struggle for survival took a back seat to the recreational spaces of, primarily, white middle-to-upper-class Americans.⁶⁰² Hetch-Hetchy was a prime

⁶⁰⁰ William J. Clinton: "Proclamation 7184 - National Park Week, 1999," April 15, 1999. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=57408>. President Clinton further connected divine blessing and national affairs: “During National Park Week, let us give thanks for the wisdom of all those who established our national parks and for the hard work and generous spirit of all those who continue to preserve them for our benefit. Because of their efforts, Americans will always find in our national parks the beauty, inspiration, knowledge, and renewal of spirit that have blessed our national journey for so long.”

⁶⁰¹ William J. Clinton: "Remarks on Signing the Proclamation Establishing the Giant Sequoia National Monument in Sequoia National Forest, California," April 15, 2000. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58135>.

⁶⁰² Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces*, 25.

example of white settler colonial discourse, caught between recreation and resource management that veiled the daily needs and traditions of local indigenous, dispossessed peoples. Muir did not recognize the need to distinguish the personhood of African and Native Americans as he did the personhood of “Sublime” beings of the nonhuman community. There is a gap in the scholarship about John Muir in fleshing out his post-human philosophy and rhetoric, but this gap must also address the silence that settler colonial literature like Muir’s places over its indigenous victims. National identity and the history that God wrote in the rocks and trees took precedence for Muir over the histories of indigenous peoples.

The field of religious studies must do more to recognize that settler colonial religious discourse homologizing Euro-American notions of “nature religion” with indigenous traditions overshadows not only cultural differences, but also a history of colonial activity by which indigenous people have had to survive by playing the field of imperial, colonial religious discourse. Applying the “nature religion” category to people like Muir assumes that both “nature” and “religion” are universal concepts or actual entities. They are not. Historian of religion Catherine L. Albanese claims that indigenous peoples were “chief practitioners” of “nature religion”; this enacts a symbolic violence and hegemonic conquest of indigenous modes of representation. Albanese claims that “just as Christianity is the religion of the Christ and his followers and Buddhism is the religion of the Buddha and his disciples, nature religion is the religion of nature and its devotees. . . . The category of nature religion is [also a way of seeing].”⁶⁰³ However, the discourses and conceptualizations of “nature” in Westernity differ greatly from indigenous iterations of the nonhuman world and its relationship with humans. Muir’s “nature” and “religion” were both largely shaped by his genteel settler colonial habitus. If

⁶⁰³ Albanese, *Nature Religion in America*, 15.

we are to apply critical analysis to the ethical construction of the engaged, informed citizen, then we must reconsider the use of categories that have operated powerfully within the colonial context of dispossession.

John Muir wrote in his magnum opus, *Our National Parks*,

One touch of nature makes the whole world kin; and it is truly wonderful how love-telling the small voices of these birds [blue or dusky grouse] are, and how far they reach through the woods into one another's hearts and into ours. The tones are so perfectly human and so full of anxious affection, few mountaineers can fail to be touched by them.⁶⁰⁴

Despite Harold Wood of the Sierra Club claiming that the opening line, which Muir got from Shakespeare, “supports Muir’s view that all people are brothers, regardless of culture or race,” the fact is that rhetoric of human kinship in the nineteenth century often masked racist discourse of white supremacy.⁶⁰⁵ Where I address Joseph LeConte and Asa Gray above should suffice to prove this. Classifying race in both humans and plants demonstrates that being a member of either does not translate to equality. But whatever “nature” was to the Western settler colonial observer, it has not yet made the whole world kin, and its touch has not guaranteed rights for either indigenous humans or nonhumans. Nature preserves are not always amenable to bioregionalism, but rather to recreation and entertainment. As long as the myths of Muir are employed, as U.S. presidents, for example, have done, settler scholars must continue to observe their political function. Scholars must reconsider the *common sense* that both they and their subjects have inherited from the systems that produced them and reflect upon how that operates in social relations of power. If the history of environmentalism teaches us anything, it is that

⁶⁰⁴ John Muir, *Our National Parks*, 218.

⁶⁰⁵ Harold Wood, “Quotations from John Muir,”

https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/favorite_quotations.aspx.

political identity does not guarantee that well-meaning and progressive individuals are free from the stain of empire.

I have attempted to recast John Muir as a genteel intellectual using Antonio Gramsci. My first order of business was to rethink the study of Muir using Gramscian, anti-essentialist approaches. Launching off of this, I then situated Muir socially to again rethink how we talk about religion and Muir's life and legacy. My final labor was to critically analyze Muir as a myth-making intellectual who used and created settler colonial common sense. This thesis has gone through a number of iterations, with portions written in Missouri, Portugal, California, and Oregon. Every site has offered opportunities to rethink how I read Muir. Like Muir's own productions, this thesis is the result of social and material conditions that have shaped the final product. Muir has given his readers a lot to think about, and history has given those readers a lot to rethink about John Muir. Just this week I waded in the Rogue River that likely took Muir through my new home state of Oregon, I gazed upon the giant Douglas fir of Muir's great admiration, and I crossed the creek that now bears his name. John Muir's father, Daniel, found his final resting place in the Elmwood Cemetery in Kansas City, one-hundred and sixty-nine miles north of the Missouri State University's Meyer Library, where this thesis will rest. All of these—the stories, place names, gravestones, and even theses—constitute types of myths. All myths have consequences. If, as Bruce Lincoln argues, myth is narrative with both credibility *and* authority, then we must consider the ethics and effects of a myth's construction and employment.⁶⁰⁶

As a white, cis-gendered male American student-scholar of religion, I have benefitted from American cultural hegemonies. I am implicated. Or, as ethicist Alexis Shotwell frames it:

⁶⁰⁶ Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, 23.

“impure.”⁶⁰⁷ But if there is such a thing as the human condition, impurity, seems to be it. The social, ethical, or moral impurity, or toxicity, if you will, of the heroes of nations and movements, has not remained quarantined from the scholar’s gaze. Social actors of many positionalities, including scholars and champions of environmentalism, are implicated in unequal relationships of power and unsustainability. The point is to listen, to look for new ways to retell history, to strive to reconsider social relations and their role in the production of myths in the light of critical, dynamic analysis. Muir has served as an example—a prophet, if you will—for many environmentalists and lovers of the outdoors. Including myself. Being theoretically against purity means rejecting essentialism and the singularity of any subject. Human acts of identification will always be, if partially, a myth. While recognizing the very real effects of the social construction and utility of categories of religion, race, and geography, it may be possible to rediscover the potentialities of the narratives that humans create. Philosopher Donna Haraway states that “ideas are themselves technologies for pursuing inquiries. It’s not that ideas are embedded in practices; they *are* technical practices of situated kinds.”⁶⁰⁸ My ideas in this thesis are a technology of the academe, serving my academic purposes. They are limited by the extents of my own positionality. Muir’s ideas too were technologies, of genteel culture. It was Muir’s God, the God of genteel theology, who wrote the history that Muir found in Yellowstone, not Ndpi, the deity of the Niitsitapi people of the Northern Plains and original Yellowstone-area nomads.⁶⁰⁹ This contrast highlights that American mythology is directly shaped by American

⁶⁰⁷ Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

⁶⁰⁸ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 282.

⁶⁰⁹ See George Bird Grinnell, “A Blackfoot Sun and Moon Myth,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 6, no. 20 (1893): 44-47.

cultural hegemony (which is in turn shaped by mythology), and it is that same hegemony that masks domination that is often misrecognized as democracy.

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