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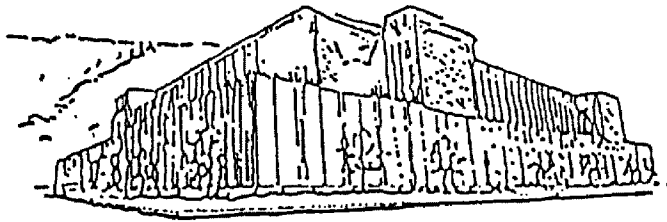
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JOHN MUIR AND THE EDENIC NARRATIVE: TOWARDS
AN UNDERSTANDING OF CLASS AND RACIAL BIAS IN THE
WRITING OF A PREEMINENT ENVIRONMENTALIST

by

Russell Owen

B.A. The University of Montana, 1993

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

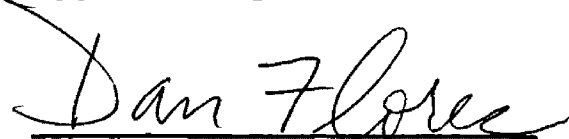
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Master of Arts

The University of Montana

1998

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John Muir and the Edenic Narrative: Towards an Understanding of Class and Racial Bias in the Writing of a Preeminent Environmentalist

Director: Dan Flores

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John Muir's writings contain biased portrayals of Native Americans and working class people. The passages where these portrayals occur have been largely ignored by John Muir's major biographers. The passages have been considered inconsistent with Muir's mature thought and, thus, not worthy of attention. When examined thoroughly, however, these passages may be understood as being consonant with John Muir's basic understanding of human history.

John Muir's conception of human history and the progress of civilization were rooted in his upbringing on Wisconsin farms and in his education at the University of Wisconsin. Both experiences led Muir to value technology and science as essential means to human progress. The preservationist especially praised the scientific disciplines. He believed humans would come to a deeper understanding of God through science.

The emphasis in John Muir's philosophy on the importance of technology and science led to a biased view of workers. Muir came to identify with and champion the efforts of industrial and intellectual elites. At the same time, he denigrated laborers and declined to admit their role in Western Civilization's advance. As his wilderness philosophy evolved, it increasingly appealed to an audience urban and wealthy in composition. John Muir's advocacy of scientific and technological advance also influenced his view of Native Americans and their respective cultures. As individuals, Native Americans were compared to the "degraded working classes." John Muir measured Native American cultures in terms of Western Civilization's ideals of human progress. Consequently, he always viewed Native American cultures as occupying a position inferior to those cultures evolving out of Western European traditions.

The failure of biographers to consider fully John Muir's biases has resulted in a simplified view of his life and his legacy. John Muir and the preservation movement have been enshrined. A more accurate view of John Muir and his legacy will open the way for a deeper understanding of the complexities at work in today's environmental conflicts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. THE EDENIC NARRATIVE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF JOHN MUIR'S WORLDVIEW	11
3. PROGRESS, THE GARDEN, AND THE WORKING CLASS ...	39
4. THE SAVAGE AND THE CIVILIZED: JOHN MUIR'S PERCEPTIONS OF NATIVE AMERICANS	69
5. CONCLUSIONS	101
BIBLIOGRAPHY	112

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In 1869, John Muir lost himself amongst the glorious peaks, meadows, valleys, and lake basins of California's Sierras for an entire summer. A year before, he had made a brief visit to the Yosemite Valley and the nearby Mariposa Grove of grand Sequoias. During the trip, the area captured Muir's imagination and, on his return in 1869, an intoxicated energy animated his explorations. He wandered through sculpted amphitheaters, climbed hump-backed peaks, strolled across fields dotted with pastel-colored wildflowers, and felt water droplets sting his face as he stood under the shattering of a waterfall.¹

However, John Muir was not alone in the Sierra. His experiences during the summer of 1869, recorded in the autobiographical work, My First Summer in the Sierra, also tell the story of a season spent tending a large flock of sheep. Muir had gained employment from a sheepman named Pat Delaney. Along with a shepherd--a hot-headed youth called Billy--Muir followed the flock into the mountain pastures of the Sierra. Delaney did not hire Muir to work directly in the job of herding, but instead used him as a sort of confidant, overseeing Billy's work. The position delighted

Muir because it allowed him to spend long days away from the sheep, enjoying the high country.²

Perhaps nothing fascinated John Muir as much as the mountains themselves. Their cut faces, domed backs, and moraines posed a riddle. Over the next several years, his geological publications would help establish the significance of glaciation on the Yosemite landscape. His work discredited the theories of a contemporary geologist, Josiah Dwight Whitney, who explained the local geology in terms of subsidence. In contrast to Muir's glacial theories, Whitney believed the Yosemite once rested on hollow space--in a series of dramatic catastrophes the valley fell like a collapsing cake.³

As with most trips, Muir's summer of shepherding had its good points and its bad. If the landscape, plants, and animals of the Sierra never failed to enchant him, the same could not be said for his travelling companions. The young shepherd, Billy, particularly irritated Muir. Among other shortcomings, Billy exhibited no appreciation for his scenic surroundings, was a poor conversationalist, indulged in chewing copious amounts of tobacco, and possessed no small share of impudence. More than anything, though, Muir found Billy disgustingly dirty:

Following the sheep he carries a heavy six-shooter swung from his belt on one side and his luncheon on the other. The ancient cloth in which the meat, fresh from the frying pan, is tied serves as a filter through which the fat and gravy juices drip

down on his right hip and leg in clustering stalactites. . . . These precious overalls are never taken off, and nobody knows how old they are, though one may guess by their thickness and concentric structure. Instead of wearing thin they wear thick, and in their stratification have no small geological significance.⁴

Muir was equally offended by the lack of hygiene exhibited by a Digger Indian who helped drive the sheep during the first days of summer, and by other Indians he encountered in the mountains. At a high pass, late in the month of August, Muir met a group of Indians on their way to the Yosemite Valley to gather acorns. As with Billy's pants, Muir relied on geology to describe their appearance: "The dirt on some of the faces seemed almost old enough and thick enough to have geological significance."⁵

Unflattering portrayals of both Native Americans and a variety of working class people--particularly shepherders, loggers, and shakemakers--abound in John Muir's writing. However, in treatments of John Muir's life, thought, and writings, these passages have been largely ignored. A few exceptions are worth note. Herbert F. Smith deals with Muir's portrayal of the shepherd, Billy, in his book John Muir. Smith offers an interesting interpretation that includes the observation that Muir utilized the shepherd Billy as a "dominant symbol of anti-nature."⁶ Nonetheless, Smith quickly dismisses any notion that Muir's portrayal of the shepherd may have been part of a wider web of bias

against working-class peoples: "Muir is no snob about 'his' wild nature. He is willing to share it with all . . ." ⁷

Similar to Herbert F. Smith, Richard Fleck recognizes the overtly negative aspects of Muir's portrayals of Native Americans. Fleck understands these aspects in terms of "culture shock." According to Fleck, Muir initially used the reigning cultural biases of his day to understand Native Americans, but later came to understand and respect them both on an individual basis and in terms of their culture.

Muir's attitudes toward the Digger Indians of California were quite prejudiced, for instance. However, after several excursions to the Alaskan glaciers where Muir lived among the various Thlinkit tribes including the Chilcats, Hoonas, and Takus, he grew to respect and honor their beliefs, actions, and life styles. ⁸

Michael P. Cohen, in his biography of John Muir The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness, suggests a slightly different way of understanding Muir's portrayal of Native Americans: "Perhaps Muir's personal experience with Indians was limited to the observation of decaying or degraded cultures." ⁹

Though writers such as Cohen and Smith have occasionally considered Muir's characterizations of Native Americans and working class peoples, they have tended to do so in isolation. These biased portrayals are not seen as important aspects of John Muir's nature philosophy, but as pedestrian examples of cultural bias that Muir unconsciously

reproduced in his writing. They are explained as atypical and contradictory to Muir's deepest convictions and beliefs.

The majority of Muir's modern biographers have underscored John Muir's break with mainstream American culture. Linnie Marsh Wolfe in her award-winning biography, Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir, emphasized Muir's rejection of the nineteenth-century's strongest values, "John Muir turned his back upon wealth and position."¹⁰ As a consequence of his rejection of mainstream cultural values, Muir was believed to possess none of the racial or class biases so typical of nineteenth-century America: "he was blazingly intolerant of bigotry and every form of social callousness."¹¹ Frederick Turner's biography, Rediscovering America: John Muir in His Time and Ours, posits a somewhat similar interpretation. Unlike Wolfe, Turner is careful not to overstate Muir's removal from mainstream culture or to underestimate its influence on his thought. Nonetheless, Turner also portrays John Muir as soberly rejecting the values of excess and greed common to his day (the nineteenth-century preoccupation with wealth and power, for example).¹² According to Turner, John Muir's exceptional intellectual and moral development set him apart from the overwhelming majority of Americans.¹³ From such a removed position, Muir was less likely to express bigotry, and more likely to appreciate minority beliefs and values,

than people clustered about the nucleus of the dominant culture.

Several biographers have characterized John Muir's break with mainstream culture in more restricted terms. These authors suggest Muir developed a philosophy far removed from orthodox Christian beliefs. In his book, John Muir and his Legacy: The American Conservation Movement, Stephen Fox asserts that "in the course of working out his own philosophy Muir made a permanent break from Christianity."¹⁴ Max Oelschlaeger makes a nearly identical observation about John Muir in his book, The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology: "He simply outgrew the constrictions of conventional faith and developed a theology of the wilderness."¹⁵

The results tend to be the same whether an author characterizes John Muir as breaking with mainstream culture, or with Christianity. In either case, the break allows John Muir a wider, more objective view, unencumbered by class or racial bias. For Max Oelschlaeger, John Muir's evolving philosophy helped him verge "on the recovery of the Paleolithic mind."¹⁶ Stephen Fox believed the development of Muir's thought also led him away from mainstream culture: "Actually Muir had more in common with Indians than with most civilized Christians."¹⁷

Reconciling the interpretations presented in preceding paragraphs with John Muir's denigrating portrayals of Native Americans and the lower classes is, at best, difficult. One can, of course, believe the biased passages should be treated as aberrations in Muir's writing. From my perspective, however, patterns begin to emerge when these passages are assembled and viewed critically.

In this thesis, I will argue that John Muir's portrayals of woodworkers and Native Americans were rooted in his most fundamental understanding of human history and its relationship to the natural world. Moreover, these conceptions of nature and history did not represent a radical departure. They were situated firmly in a tradition that was Western European and Christian in orientation.

Historians Donald Worster, Dennis Williams, and Mark Stoll have studied the impact of Christianity on Muir's nature philosophy in recent years.¹⁸ The religiosity of Muir's father, who adhered to the doctrines of a Protestant sect called the Campbellites, had a particularly profound impact on Muir both in youth and in his mature thoughts. My approach varies from that used by the above mentioned authors in giving John Muir's view of history special attention. My interest lies in understanding how Muir's ideas related to popularly held beliefs concerning the advance of Western Civilization. These ideas derived much of their substance from Christian traditions. Worster,

Williams, and Stoll are more interested in understanding how Muir's biocentrism, spirituality, and environmental activism derived from Christian teachings (Campbellite beliefs, specifically). Nonetheless, I like to think my thesis shares, with the work of these authors, in a more careful contextualization of John Muir's ideology.

My thesis will be divided into three chapters. The first will chart and interpret the early development of Muir's attitudes towards human history and nature. In the second chapter, I will discuss how these attitudes translated into biased portraits of laborers, and small producers. The third chapter will follow the development of John Muir's attitudes towards Native Americans. In the concluding pages of my paper I will consider the significance of John Muir's portrayals of Native Americans and working class people in terms of environmental history and the modern environmental movement.

1. For background on Muir's first visit of 1868 I referred to Thurman Wilkins, John Muir: Apostle of Nature (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 57-58. The rest of the paragraph is drawn loosely from John Muir, My First Summer in the Sierra (Boston and Constable, London: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911; reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 185-287.
2. Muir, My First Summer, 191-192.
3. For general background of John Muir's contributions to geology see Dennis R. Dean, "Muir and Geology," in John Muir: Life and Work, ed. Sally M. Miller (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 168-93. Muir's opposition to Whitney's theory is detailed in Linnie Marsh Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1945; reprint, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 131-33.
4. Muir, My First Summer, 237-38.
5. *Ibid.*, 271.
6. Herbert F. Smith, John Muir (New Haven, Conn.: College & University Press, 1965), 59.
7. *Ibid.*, 63.
8. Richard F. Fleck, "John Muir's Evolving Attitudes Toward Native American Cultures," American Indian Quarterly 2 (Feb, 1978): 19. For Fleck's argument in more depth see Richard F. Fleck Henry Thoreau and John Muir among the Indians (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1985).
9. Michael P. Cohen, The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 185.
10. Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, ix.
11. *Ibid.*, viii.
12. Frederick Turner, Rediscovering America: John Muir in His Time and Ours (New York: Viking, 1985; reprint, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1985), 320.
13. Frederick Turner provides evidence that Muir concurred with Ralph Waldo Emerson's celebration of the trials and separateness of "the man of genius." See Turner, Rediscovering America, 217.
14. Stephen Fox, John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1981), 50.

15. Max Oelschlaeger, The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 177.
16. Ibid., 184.
17. Fox, John Muir and His Legacy, 364.
18. For these studies, see Donald Worster, "John Muir and the Roots of American Environmentalism," chap. in The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 184-202; Dennis Williams, "John Muir, Christian Mysticism, and the Spiritual Value of Nature," in John Muir: Life and Work, edited by Sally M. Miller (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 82-99; and Mark Stoll, "God and John Muir: A Psychological Interpretation of John Muir's Journey from the Campbellites to the 'Range of Light,'" in John Muir: Life and Work, 64-81.

CHAPTER 2

THE EDENIC NARRATIVE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF JOHN MUIR'S WORLDVIEW

On the tenth of November, 1875, winter storm clouds began to sift into the Yosemite Valley. Soon snow would fall on the cliffs and mountain faces, bringing the lines of granite fractures and striations into exquisite relief. To John Muir, it was the perfect time to climb a peak before winter descended in full earnest. Despite the warnings of an old mountaineer, he chose to climb one of the area's most difficult peaks, the South Dome.

Fortunately, John Muir's ascent went smoothly and he was able to enjoy "one of those brooding changeful days that come between the Indian summer and winter."¹ At the summit, he watched as lustrous, white clouds filled the valley below him. And then, something unusual happened.

Gazing, admiring, I was startled to see for the first time the rare optical phenomenon of the 'Spectre of Brocken.' My shadow, clearly outlined, about half a mile long, lay upon this glorious white surface with startling effect. I walked back and forth, waved my arms and struck all sorts attitudes, to see every slightest movement enormously exaggerated.²

From a modern perspective, John Muir's experience on South Dome seems to prophesy the future. In 1875, the critical elements of his nature philosophy were in place, but his

enormous legacy to the preservation and protection of parks like Yosemite would rest on his work during future decades.

In the following chapter, I wish to focus not on John Muir's influence--the giant shadow he cast--but the development of the man who stood on the top of South Dome in 1875. I will look specifically at how Muir's understanding of nature and wilderness were delineated by his conceptions of human history. Central to this task is an understanding of "the story" that European Americans told themselves during the nineteenth century--the story that both motivated and justified the conquest of Native American lands and the industrialization of America's cities.

To accomplish this objective, I will summarize a recent essay by historian Carolyn Merchant, identifying the components and provenance of this dominant story of European culture. It is a story she identifies as "the Edenic narrative." In turn, I will consider the development of John Muir's philosophy of history, showing how it borrowed and deviated from the Edenic narrative in its popular form--acquiring shades of intellectual elitism as it grew more unique.

In her recent essay, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," Carolyn Merchant studies the biblical story of Eden from an environmental perspective.³ She considers how the story of Adam and Eve's

expulsion from the Garden of Eden has shaped the European American understanding of humans and their relationship to nature. According to Merchant, "the story of Western civilization since the seventeenth century and its advent on the American continent can be conceptualized as a grand narrative of fall and recovery."⁴ The plot of such a story follows a long, slow line of ascension from the fall of Adam and Eve to the successful reclamation of Eden on the American continent.

Carolyn Merchant begins tracing the development of the Recovery Narrative from the Renaissance. She notes that explorers described their discoveries of new lands in terms of rediscovering Eden. With the arrival of the seventeenth century, however, the Edenic narrative developed a new dimension with "New World colonists . . . [undertaking] a massive effort to reinvent the whole earth in the image of Eden."⁵ Moreover, leading intellectuals began to see science, technology, and laissez-faire capitalism as an exciting means to recreate the Garden.

An important dimension to Merchant's understanding is the role of gender in the Edenic Narrative. As the narrative developed, nature came to represent fallen Eve.

Nature, in the Edenic recovery story, appears in three forms. As original Eve, nature is a virgin, pure, and light--land that is pristine or barren, but that has the potential for development. As fallen Eve, nature is disorderly and chaotic; a wilderness, wasteland, or desert requiring improvement; dark and witchlike, the victim and mouthpiece

of Satan as serpent. As mother Eve, nature is an improved garden, nurturing earth bearing fruit, ripened ovary, maturity.⁶

Fallen Adam, on the other hand, appeared in a variety of modern guises--from scientist to frontiersmen, from industrial leader to farmer. In America, the overall project of these men was the recovery of lost Eden.

The Edenic Narrative owed its development to more than a Christian tradition revitalized by the Enlightenment. As Merchant points out, the Narrative also possessed Greco-Roman roots. For example, Christians used the ancient Greek story of slow decline from a golden age to reinforce, "the . . . image of the precipitous fall from the Garden of Eden."⁷ From the Roman tradition came the philosophical base to understand human progress. Virgil developed a cyclical narrative structure to explain the development of civilizations. According to Merchant, his narrative mimicked "the human life cycle," civilizations grew out of chaos (winter), to a pastoral state (spring), to the development of agriculture (summer), and the establishment of cities (fall), eventually falling back into winter. Virgil's narrative influenced the Edenic narrative in that it showed the growth of civilization as a logical, natural progression. In the case of the Edenic narrative the end-point of the progression was located in the reconstruction of Eden.

The power of the Edenic narrative in European American history would be hard to overestimate. Merchant argues that it served as a powerful propellant for the conquest of American lands and peoples. She demonstrates how writing, from William Bradford's histories of the Pilgrims to Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis," followed the "six elements of the heroic narrative identified by the Russian Folklorist Vladimir Propp."⁸ The conquest of America, from New England to "the Great American Desert," was recounted in terms of heroic men working to recreate the Garden. Native Americans presented somewhat of a problem for writers of the Edenic Narrative. Though most Native Americans rejected the Edenic Narrative in favor of their own origin stories, European Americans came to consider Indians as the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. As a consequence, Native Americans were urged to share in the Edenic Narrative by taking up the plow.⁹

Carolyn Merchant relies on a number of paintings to demonstrate the key characteristics of the Edenic narrative during the nineteenth century. Among these are John Gast's American Progress, Emanuel Leutze's Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way, Domenico Tojetti's Progress of America, and George Willoughby Maynard's Civilization. These paintings, along with written texts, illustrate the role of female nature in the recovery narrative. In addition, all of them illustrate American progress in terms

of recreating Eden. Progress is shown as a movement away from dark, wild nature (populated by savages and wild beasts), to a light, pristine civilization (represented in three of the paintings as a white-robed woman). In these narratives--exemplified by the paintings--both nature and civilization are feminine. Male farmers and frontiersman act as a go-between, pushing back the darkness represented by nature and opening the way for civilization. Though nature is represented as female in all Edenic narratives, Merchant points out that it is not always viewed negatively.

. . . [nature's] valence, however, varies from the negative satanic forest of William Bradford and the untamed wilderness of the pioneer (fallen Eve) to the positive pristine Eden and mother earth of John Muir (original and Mother Eve) and the parks of Frederick Law Olmsted. As wilderness vanishes before advancing civilization, its remnants must be preserved as test zones for men (epitomized by Theodore Roosevelt) to hone male strength and skills.¹⁰

In the four paintings mentioned above, civilization represents the transformation from the unordered chaos of wild nature to the order and culture of civilization. Merchant is careful to note, however, that these paintings posited a subtext deeply biased against non-Anglos. George Willoughby Maynard's painting--the embodiment of civilization as a white-robed woman--serves as an example: "The figure's Anglo-Saxon whiteness excludes the blackness of matter, darkness, and dark-skinned people."¹¹

The transformation of wild nature was widely celebrated in America. However, men began to feel regrets by the end

of the nineteenth century. Such regrets found expression in attempts to save wild nature, "as a place for men to test maleness, strength, and virility, and an apparent association of men with nature."¹² According to Merchant we continue to act out the hopes of the recovery narrative in our optimism and enthusiasm for biotechnology. Post-modernists have grown increasingly critical of the recovery narrative, but in doing so many simply reverse the plot structure of the Edenic narrative. Instead of offering an ascensionist plot, they substitute one of declension, showing Western Civilization descending from a prior golden age. Merchant admits that finding alternatives to the linear plot-line of the Edenic narrative will be difficult. Indeed, she questions whether it is possible to write non-sequenced, non-linear history. However, she suggests a new ethic is needed to reduce the more exploitive characteristics of Western culture, and to bring "humans and nonhuman nature into a dynamically balanced, more nearly equal relationship."¹³

For John Muir, building a conceptual framework to understand human history took several decades. The most important influences were his religiously and physically rigorous childhood and the two and a half years he spent at the University of Wisconsin. In the following pages I will

trace the development of Muir's own narrative of Western Civilization from childhood through his landmark "botanical tour" through the Southern United States and his arrival in California in 1868.

John Muir was born to Anne Gilrye and Daniel Muir in Dunbar Scotland on the twenty-first of April, 1838. His father, a devout follower of a Protestant sect led by Alexander Campbell, left a profitable business in Scotland and moved his family to the United States in 1849. Along with his brothers and sisters, John lived and worked on two farms in the state of Wisconsin before leaving home in early adulthood. By his own account, life on the farm was a continuous cycle of dawn-to-dusk labor.

In summer the chores were grinding scythes, feeding the animals, chopping stove-wood, and carrying water up the hill from the spring on the edge of the meadow, etc. I was foolishly ambitious to be first in the mowing and cradling, and by the time I was sixteen led all the hired men. An hour was allowed at noon for dinner and more chores. We stayed in the field until dark, then supper, and still more chores, family worship, and to bed; making altogether a hard, sweaty day of about sixteen or seventeen hours. Think of that, ye blessed eight-hour-day laborers!¹⁴

Any spare time in this rigorous schedule was spent in religious instruction. Under his father's harsh discipline, John Muir memorized three quarters of the Old Testament and the entire New Testament before reaching adolescence. Nonetheless, as he progressed through adolescence, Muir managed to acquaint himself with many Western classics by reading on the sly.¹⁵

The severe qualities of Muir's upbringing contributed an important building-block to his conception of progress and human history. Several historians have noted that his incessant exposure to hard labor led to powerful creative impulses in late childhood and early adulthood.¹⁶ Without plans or formal training he built an unusual variety of machines and instruments from scraps of wood and metal found around the farm. Besides barometers and thermometers, there were a variety of clocks, a self-setting table saw, and an early-or-late-rising machine (a bed that stood on end at an appointed hour, and ejected the tardy sleeper).¹⁷

For the most part, John Muir's inventions were intended to save time. The purpose of the machines, however, went beyond such a simple objective. As biographer Linnie Marsh Wolfe has observed, "John Muir believed in machines as means of releasing man from drudgery, setting human energies free for higher development."¹⁸ This belief remained important to Muir and can be evidenced in his recollections of youth penned near the end of his life.

Many of our old neighbors toiled and sweated and grubbed themselves into their graves years before their natural dying days, in getting a living on a quarter-section of land and vaguely trying to get rich, while bread and raiment might have been serenely won on less than a fourth of this land, and time gained to get better acquainted with God.¹⁹

John Muir felt technological improvements would provide the means to improve the efficiency of agriculture and manufacturing. But efficiency alone did not constitute

progress. Mechanical advances allowed people more time for spiritual actualization and knowledge. From Muir's view the quest and accumulation of knowledge stood as hallmarks of civilization. Thus, inventors were essential to progress. Inventors and mechanics were some of society's most important members, because they enabled people to know God. One would be showing high aspirations by becoming an inventor, but an even higher calling was possible.

John Muir's creations eventually led him away from the farm. He showed several of them to enthusiastic audiences at a state fair in Madison, Wisconsin. Experiences there piqued his interest in the University of Wisconsin and, within a short while, Muir began taking classes. To advance his studies he employed two machines. An early-rising machine ensured he wasted no time in superfluous sleep. He also constructed a study desk that dispensed and discarded books at timed intervals--thus preventing the student from dawdling over any single text for too long.²⁰

More important than his inventions, Muir discovered the natural sciences at the University of Wisconsin. During two and a half years of study, he developed an abiding love for the disciplines of geology and botany.

Looking back on my college course, the views opened by Chemistry, Physics, Geology, and Botany seemed to me the most useful and wonderful. The attraction and repulsion of the atoms composing the globe, marching and retreating--the harmony, the oneness, of all the life of the world, etcetera--the methods by which nature builds and pulls down

in sculpturing the globe: one form of beauty after another in endless variety.²¹

Dr. Ezra Slocum Carr initiated Muir in these studies, and his influence on Muir's thought was profound. Along with his wife, Jeanne, Dr. Carr gave Muir encouragement and allowed him access to their personal library. Hailing from the East, the Carrs brought some of the freshest thought in the earth sciences and philosophy to the University of Wisconsin. Ezra Carr transported the ideas of Swiss-born geologist Louis Agassiz. On both a personal and intellectual level, Ezra and Jeanne were acquainted with the leading New England Transcendentalists.²²

In her book, Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875, Barbara Novak discusses the development, during the nineteenth century, of the idea of "nature as a holy text." To leading Transcendentalists, artists, and scientists in America, nature provided a book by which to know and understand God. The study of science was especially useful in understanding God, because it revealed the order with which God imbued His creation. Through disciplines such as botany and geology, one found not chaos and disorder, but carefully planned creation.²³ The impact of these ideas on Muir, as well as a certain awe for scientists, is expressed in the following letter from John Muir to Jeanne Carr.

We remember in a peculiar way those who first give us the story of Redeeming Love from the great book of revelation, and I shall not forget the Doctor

[Ezra Carr], who first laid before me the great book of Nature, and though I have taken so little from his hand, he has at least shown me where those mines of priceless knowledge lie and how to reach them.

O how frequently, Mrs. Carr, when lonely and wearied, have I wished that like some hungry worm I could creep into that delightful kernel of your house--your library--with its portraits of scientific men, and so bountiful a store of their sheaves amid the blossom and verdure of your little kingdom of plants, luxuriant and happy as though holding their leaves to the open sky of the most flower-loving zone in the world.²⁴

The years at University gave Muir the material to further develop his conceptions of history and progress. Added to his belief that the development of inventions represented progress--because they allowed the acquisition of spiritual knowledge--he now came to see science as the means to gain a better understanding of God. If inventors and mechanics were the blades of progress, then scientists were the cutting edge. Where the inventor released humans from labor and allowed time for spiritual discovery, it was the scientists who revealed God's plans as evidenced in nature.

The Civil War disrupted Muir's studies. In 1864, convinced he was about to join thousands of other young men drafted into the Union Army, he fled to Canada and remained there until 1866. While in Canada, Muir found opportunities to engage the knowledge he acquired at the University of Wisconsin. The following is another extraction from a letter penned to Jeanne Carr.

What you say respecting the littleness of the number who are called to 'the pure and deep communion of the beautiful, all-loving Nature,' is particu-

larly true of the hard-working, hard-drinking, stolid Canadians. In vain is the glorious chart of God in Nature spread out for them. So many acres chopped is their motto, so they grub away amid the smoke of magnificent forest trees, black as demons and material as the soil they move upon. I often think of the Doctor's [Ezra Carr's] lecture upon the condition of the different races of men as controlled by physical agencies. Canada, though abounding in the elements of wealth, is too difficult to subdue to permit the first few generations to arrive at any great intellectual development. In my long rambles last summer I did not find a single person who knew anything of botany and but few who knew the meaning of the word . . .²⁵

In the above lines we can see, in nascent form, the beginning of John Muir's own version of Western Civilization's story.

With Carolyn Merchant's Edenic narrative in mind, we can interpret the above passage as casting the emigration of people from Europe to the Americas as a lapsarian moment (a lapse distancing them from The Garden). These humans begin by clearing the wilderness and, like Cain and Abel, practicing rudimentary forms of cultivation and animal husbandry. In fact, they are so far fallen that Muir compares them to demons. Their bodies carry signs of their Fall in the form of dirt and smoke. Civilization is represented not by the coming of missionaries to convert the retrograde, but by the coming of science, as represented by botany. While Muir's passage appears negative, it implies that progress is imminent. The land will be opened, inventions made, and civilization will follow.

Though Muir extensively explored wild country and indulged his new love for botany in Canada, it was not his knowledge as a scientist that put bread on the table, but his skills as a mechanic. While in Canada, he found work in the factory of William Trout and Charles Jay. Muir's exceptional talents did not go unused, and he helped improve efficiency by making adjustments to the partner's machinery. Though he felt challenged by the work, Muir believed he was not truly following his calling. He betrayed his uncertainties about the importance of his work in a self-conscious letter written to Jeanne Carr in 1866.

I invented and put in operation a few days ago an attachment for a selfacting lathe which has increased its capacity by at least one third, we are now using it to turn broom handles, and as these useful articles may now be made cheaper, and as cleanliness is one of the cardinal virtues, I congratulate myself in having done something like a true philanthropist for the real good of mankind in general. What say you?²⁶

The factory of William Trout and Charles Jay burned down in the process of fulfilling a contract for brooms. Thousands of brooms went up in flames and, after settling affairs with the partners, John Muir returned to the United States.²⁷

Early in 1866, Muir moved to Indianapolis and began working as a mechanic for Osgood and Smith, a well-established carriage company. As in Canada, Muir's employers soon recognized his exceptional talents both as an inventor and as an organizer. While working for the company, Muir helped improve the efficiency of its machinery

and completed a report identifying wasteful practices. Not only did he study the efficiency of the factory's organization, he also examined the productivity of the company's work force. Among other things, he found the workers increased their productivity when under the direct observation of a supervisor.²⁸

As in Canada, career-oriented goals appeared poised to eclipse the young mechanic's dreams of following a higher calling. Writing to his sister, Sarah Muir, John expressed his intent to abandon his earlier plans of becoming a botanist:

Circumstances over which I have had no control almost compell me to abandon the profession of my choice, and to take up the business of an inventor . . . unless things change soon, I shall turn my whole mind into that channel.²⁹

The change Muir alluded to, came with unexpected severity. At the factory, the end of a file struck one of Muir's eyes, causing permanent damage. Because of a sympathetic reaction in the uninjured eye, the young inventor found himself plunged into darkness.³⁰

The accident caused Muir to reassess his priorities. For years he had pored over maps of "the Southern States, the West Indies, South America, and Europe," making plans for an extensive "botanical journey."³¹ Immediately after the accident, he quit work in the factory and rejected a proposal from Osgood and Smith for a partnership in their

company. As soon as he recovered health, and his sight, he embarked on the journey.³²

Muir made his way on foot through the South, a region still suffering from the trauma of four years of civil war. As he travelled, he noticed the effects of war on battered buildings, torn landscapes, and the wearied faces of the survivors. He hiked through Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, down a good portion of Florida to the Gulf of Mexico, and then gained passage on a ship bound for Havana. Unable to find a ship to sail to South America, he determined to see California. To do so, Muir first took passage on a boat carrying oranges to New York City, then boarded another boat to the Isthmus of Panama, crossed the Isthmus by railroad, and caught a ship heading north along the Mexico and California coasts.³³

This grand journey proved to be of exceptional import. In the account of his wanderings, A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf (assembled from his journals and published posthumously in 1916), the framework for his understanding of the human place in nature stands almost complete. A central feature of this understanding was Muir's direct identification of nature and wilderness with the Garden of Eden.

John Muir's equating of nature with the Garden of Eden was hardly unique. In fact, equating the two was common among writers and artists in the early part of the

nineteenth century, most notably the Transcendentalists.³⁴ Muir was probably exposed to the description of nature in terms of an unblemished, pristine garden in conversations with Ezra and Jeanne Carr. Throughout A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf the aspiring botanist described different forests in the Southern United States in terms of the Garden of Eden. He produced the most exemplary description of nature as a Garden as he made his first rambles in California.

The sky was perfectly delicious, sweet enough for the breath of angels; every draught of it gave a separate and distinct piece of pleasure. I do not believe that Adam and Eve ever tasted better in their balmiest nook.

The last of the Coast Range foothills were in near view all the way to Gilroy. Their union with the valley by curves and slopes of inimitable beauty. They were robed with the greenest grass and richest light I ever beheld, and were coloured and shaded with myriads of flowers of every hue, chiefly of purple and golden yellow. Hundreds of crystal rills joined song with the larks, filling all the valley with music like a sea, making it Eden from end to end.³⁵

Though not new, the idea of nature as Garden provided Muir a premise from which he could draw his own conclusions concerning the human place in nature.

For the modern reader acquainted with a good sampling of his work, John Muir appears to possess a fetishistic fascination with dirt. This fascination may have been a result of his strict religious upbringing and his Scottish

heritage. Writing his autobiography, Muir confessed that these two influences combined to produce gigantic efforts at mastery over the body.

Like Scotch children in general we were taught grim self-denial, in season and out of season, to mortify the flesh, keep our bodies in subjection to Bible laws, and mercilessly punish ourselves for every fault imagined or committed.³⁶

John Muir's childhood experience parallels that of many middle-class peoples living under the severe strictures of Victorian times. In a study of European culture, The Politics & Poetics of Transgression, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have linked middle-class fascinations with dirt, or "the low," to such self-discipline. Writing on the nineteenth century city, they write the following: "As the bourgeoisie produced new forms of regulation and prohibition governing their own bodies, they wrote ever more loquaciously of the body of the Other--of the city's 'scum.'"³⁷

Though the derivation of Muir's fascination is interesting, my main purpose here is to understand how Muir used dirt as a symbol in his writing. In nature, John Muir found beauty, order, and harmony. These qualities underscored the fallen condition of humanity and nothing symbolized this condition so well as dirt. On the human body, dirt functioned as the mark of the human Fall from grace. It was a mark all humans bore. This is not to say dirt was a symbol of democracy. According to Muir's

observations in the South, civilized people were cleaner and neater than the uncivilized. In Murphy, North Carolina, he made the following comments about a house belonging to the local sheriff.

. . . I found a house decked with flowers and vines, clean within and without, and stamped with the comforts of culture and refinement in all its arrangements. Striking contrast to the uncouth transitionist establishments from the wigwams of savages to the clumsy but clean log castle of the thrifty pioneer.³⁸

In this, Muir's view of progress closely follows the pattern Carolyn Merchant lays out in her description of the Edenic narrative. As people became more civilized, they became cleaner, thus coming closer to the un-soiled state of Adam and Eve prior to the Fall. Further progress could be observed in the development of an aesthetic sensibility. Thus, the sheriff and his wife occupied a higher plane than the clean but clumsy pioneer.

Lack of dirt corresponded directly with civilization, but in a less reliable way it also corresponded to class and race. During his travels in the South, Muir remarked on the lack of cleanliness exhibited by a poor couple who were kind enough to offer him food. He described the skin of the man and woman, both suffering from malaria, as covered with, "the most diseased and incurable dirt that I ever saw, evidently desperately chronic and hereditary."³⁹

Similarly, African Americans were often described as appearing very dirty, although "level of civilization"

always remained more important to cleanliness than class or race in Muir's world. In his journal kept during his crossing of the Isthmus of Panama, Muir compared the Negroes of Panama with those of the South. He found the former "much superior to [those] of N[orth] am[erica] in form and cleanliness." Though his travels to date had been limited to Canada, New York, the South, and Cuba, he ventured that he "did not think that the poor of [any] other civ[ilized] country are half so successful in efforts for clean-
[liness]." ⁴⁰ As for himself, Muir dressed without pretention. But even during his wilderness "immersions" he was, as one acquaintance remembered, "exquisitely neat in his dress and appearance." ⁴¹

In opposition to the fallen, unclean, state of human beings stood the pristine natural world. In the Southern United States, Muir found in the most dangerous wild animals a purity absent from human beings. Unlike Adam and Eve, wild animals had not experienced a fall from grace.

Though alligators, snakes, etc., naturally repel us, they are not mysterious evils. They dwell happily in these flowery wilds, are part of God's family, unfallen, undepraved, and cared with the same species of tenderness and love as is bestowed on angels in heaven or saints on earth. ⁴²

The Fall also affected the animals that humans domesticated: "Man and other civilized animals are the only creatures that ever become dirty." ⁴³ Juxtaposing the filth of humans and their tame animals with the purity of wild animals became one of Muir's most utilized devices. The following example,

from his book The Mountains of California (first published in 1894), contrasts wild and domesticated sheep:

we may observe that the domestic sheep, in a general way, is expressionless, like a dull bundle of something only half alive, while the wild is as elegant and graceful as a deer, every movement manifesting admirable strength and character. The tame is timid; the wild is bold. The tame is always more or less ruffled and dirty; while the wild is as smooth and clean as the flowers of his mountain pasture.⁴⁴

To some extent Muir extended his Edenic metaphor to cultivated plants. Possibly because of his successful efforts at fruit ranching, however, he did not describe domesticated plants as exhibiting, so clearly, the marks of the Fall.

If John Muir invested woodlands and mountains with the qualities of a pristine Eden, he portrayed cities as carrying the dark stigma of Adam and Eve's expulsion. As with humans, cities could be more or less civilized but in their essence they provided a perfect antipode to the Garden. In the course of his journey to the Gulf, and subsequent travels in Cuba, New York, and California, Muir complained of the congestion he found. The noise of Havana particularly offended his ears, while the mass of humanity in New York intimidated him. In every case, the chaos of the city contrasted sharply with the order and harmony of The Garden.⁴⁵

Muir's distrust of cities increased over the years, demonstrating conflict in his philosophy. How could

progress be unequivocally good when its offspring included crowded, poverty-ridden cities? Muir never fully answered this question. Instead, he continued to understand progress and civilization as bringing people closer to God. He refused to associate any of the negative aspects of industrial growth and scientific advance with progress. In his later years, when advancing civilization came in direct conflict with the existence of pristine wilderness, Muir would not blame progress--in the form of scientific and technological advance--but would finger old-fashioned vices, such as greed.

John Muir's equation of wildness and nature with the Garden of Eden placed him in the company of writers who questioned the dominant version of the Edenic Narrative during the nineteenth century. The dominant version, as outlined by Carolyn Merchant, characterized the advance of Europeans across the American continent as resulting in the recreation of Eden--in the guise of carefully cultivated gardens or farms, and in the apotheosis of civilization: the city. Though Muir saw many benefits in progress and civilization, he did not believe people could recreate the Garden. As fallen mortals, how could they? The Garden was already created by God. It was tangible in the woodlands of

the South and North, as well as the mountains of California and the West.

John Muir's modification of the Edenic Narrative was unique in its relocation of Garden imagery from cultivated fields to pristine mountains. Still, he retained the basic structure of the Edenic Narrative. He celebrated progress in science and technology and, in a closely related sense, the advance of civilization. Humans could come closer to God through progress. In other words, scientific advancement would enable them to better understand the word of God. Their nearness to God would be evident in their relative purity, as opposed to the filth of the "savage." And yet, humanity could never escape its Fallen state, except in death, which promised to reunite humans with the order of God's garden. Consequently, people were always invaders in those places Muir defined as Eden. They could enter these places as visitors, as humble pilgrims, but they could not live in them.

John Muir's version of civilization and progress exhibited one more unique trait that bears mention. His work did not glorify the American character. Unlike Frederick Jackson Turner, John Muir never suggested that the American Frontier, or wilderness for that matter, produced anything more unusual than physically and spiritually healthy individuals.⁴⁶ John Muir's deep affection for his native Scotland, and pride in his Scottish heritage, may

have precluded a need for any notions of American exceptionalism. Biographer Thurman Wilkins offers the following grounds for John Muir's flight to Canada during the Civil War: "the fundamental reason was that he considered himself more Scottish than American, as indeed he was (he would not become an American citizen until he was sixty-five years old)."⁴⁷ Self-preservation and pacifistic leanings probably also had a part, but Muir's consistent expressions of a pride in his heritage certainly support Wilkins' statement.

The deep influence of his boyhood in Scotland distinguished Muir's values from those of many Americans. As will be discussed in the following chapter, Muir did not place as much stock in personal independence and freedom, as he did in the Scottish values of self-discipline and efficiency.

A NOTE ON CITATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in citations to primary material: AMs-this abbreviation is used to indicate handwritten manuscripts; TMs-indicates typewritten manuscripts; L-denotes letters. Primary material used in writing this thesis was found in the Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers (1858-1957), edited by Ronald H. Limbaugh and Kirsten E. Lewis, (Alexandria VA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1985). The quoted titles of John Muir's journals, notes, and other papers are supplied with each note and, used in conjunction with the reel number at the end of a specific note, may be quickly found in The Guide and Index to the Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 1858-1957.

1. John Muir, The Yosemite (New York: The Century Co., 1912; reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 679.
2. Ibid.
3. Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, paperback edition, edited by William Cronon (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 132-159.
4. Ibid., 133.
5. Ibid., 134.
6. Ibid., 137.
7. Ibid., 138.
8. Ibid., 140.
9. For the purpose of her essay, Carolyn Merchant simplifies European views of Native Americans. Not all nineteenth-century European Americans thought Indians should take up the plow. For those who did, the Edenic Narrative did not provide the only rationale for integration. A more thorough treatment of nineteenth-century European views of Native Americans and agriculture may be found in Robert E. Bieder's book, Science Encounters the Indian, 1820-1880 (Norman and London: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 16-45.
10. Merchant, "Reinventing Eden," 147.

11. Ibid., 149.
12. Ibid., 153.
13. Ibid., 158.
14. John Muir, The Story of my Boyhood and Youth (The Atlantic Monthly Company, 1912; reprint, Madison and Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 161-62.
15. For background on Daniel Muir and the family's move to America, I have relied on Linnie Marsh Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1945; reprint, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 11-30. For John Muir's memories of rigorous farm life, see John Muir, The Story of my Boyhood, 175-77.
16. See Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, 103. Also, see Stephen Fox, John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1981), 35.
17. Muir, Boyhood and Youth, 201-203.
18. Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, 103.
19. Muir, Boyhood and Youth, 176.
20. Ibid., 225-27
21. John Muir, "First Draft Autobiography," TMs, ca. 1908, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers (1858-1957), edited by Ronald H. Limbaugh and Kirsten E. Lewis, (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1985), 46.
22. Frederick Turner, Rediscovering America: John Muir in His Time and Ours (New York: Viking, 1985; reprint, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1985), 102-06.
23. Barbara Novak, Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3-9.
24. John Muir, Trouts Mill, Canada, to Mrs. Jeanne Carr, L, 13 September 1865, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 1.
25. John Muir, "The Hollow" [Canada], to Jeanne Carr, L, 21 January 1866, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 1.
26. John Muir, Canada, to Jeanne C. Carr, L, 21 January 1866, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 1.

27. See Turner, Rediscovering America, 117-20.
28. Ibid., 123-26.
29. John Muir, Indianapolis, Ind., to Sarah Muir Galloway, L, May 1866, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 1.
30. Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness, 103-04.
31. John Muir, Indianapolis, Indiana, to the Merrills and Moores, Indianapolis, Indiana, L, circa 4 March 1867, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 1.
32. Thurman Wilkins, John Muir: Apostle of Nature (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 45-48.
33. John Muir, A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf, in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, introduced by Terry Gifford (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 119-83.
34. Novak, Nature and Culture, 3-17.
35. Muir, Thousand Mile Walk, 175.
36. Muir, Boyhood and Youth, 105.
37. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics & Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 126.
38. Muir, Thousand Mile Walk, 131-32.
39. Ibid., 134.
40. John Muir, "At Sea; Isthmus of Panama," AMs [Journal], 1868 ca. March 16-18, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 23.
41. Mrs. McChesney, [Sarah J. ?], "Reminiscences of John Muir," TMs, 22 September 1916, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 51.
42. Muir, Thousand Mile Walk, 148.
43. Ibid., 152.
44. John Muir, The Mountains of California (New York: Century, 1894); reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 421.
45. For a particularly vivid description of Havanna see the following letter: John Muir, New York, to David Gilrye Muir, L,

3 March 1868, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 1. Muir's views of New York may be found in A Thousand Mile Walk, 174-75.

46. Frederick Jackson Turner's influential "Frontier Thesis" argued that the demands of the American Frontier resulted in a unique "American character." See Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Proceedings of the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (Madison, Wis., 1894), 79-112.

47. Thurman Wilkins, John Muir: Apostle of Nature (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 39.

CHAPTER 3

PROGRESS, THE GARDEN, AND THE WORKING CLASS

Following his arrival in California, John Muir's convictions concerning human progress intensified, and his identification of nature with the Garden of Eden acquired new dimensions. One result of these trends was a deep alienation between John Muir and working class people. This alienation was compounded by physical separation: As he became wealthier and as his reputation as a naturalist grew, his contacts with working people were limited and delineated by social conventions. Muir increasingly denigrated working class people and their role in society, while venerating the role of elites and championing their interests.

From John Muir's perspective, physical labor was closely associated with the Fall from Grace. As was discussed in the preceding chapter, he viewed settlers clearing the Canadian forests in negative terms. Though they played a small role in preparing civilization's way, they were dirty and appeared "demonic." Following his tour of the South and arrival in California, John Muir came to clarify his views of labor and the working classes.

John Muir's immersion into the mountains of California began in 1869 and is recorded in his book, My First Summer In the Sierra. As was mentioned in the opening pages of

this thesis, he spent the summer of 1869 overseeing the work of a shepherd named Billy for Pat Delaney. During the course of the season, Muir came to the conclusion that capitalism was far more injurious to workers like Billy than to wealthier, better-educated people like Pat Delaney. The lust for wealth could hinder an owner of sheep from appreciating the beauty of nature, or its value, except in a strictly utilitarian sense. On the other hand, the desire for economic gain would lead the shepherd to indulge in improbable fantasies of success, ultimately culminating in insanity.

. . . though [the shepherd is] stimulated at times by hopes of one day owning a flock and getting rich like his boss, he at the same time is likely to be degraded by the life he leads, and seldom reaches the dignity or advantage--or disadvantage--of ownership.¹

Rather than becoming owner of a flock, the shepherd becomes trapped in a numbing world of dreary work and isolation: "Of course his health suffers, reacting on his mind; and seeing nobody for weeks or months, he finally becomes semi insane or wholly so."²

In 1879, John Muir made the first of several trips to Alaska. During the course of the journey he visited the Cassiar gold mines to satisfy curiosity about the region's geology. His observations of miners led him to believe that the same lust for wealth animating the shepherd also infected the miner.

I greatly enjoyed this little inland side trip-- the wide views; the miners along the branches of the great river, busy as moles and beavers; young men dreaming and hoping to strike it rich and rush home to marry their girls faithfully waiting; others hoping to clear off weary farm mortgages, and brighten the lives of the anxious home folk; but most, I suppose, just struggling blindly for gold enough to make them indefinitely rich to spend their lives in aimless affluence, honour, and ease.³

In undated draft fragments (ca. 1899), Muir predicted a wretched end for those who followed the gold siren.

Life is suddenly interrupted & few can splice it again [. . .] go back to old ties & duties merely richer . . . all necessarily changed & if unsuccessful[,] many[--]even with families in States[--]creep into corners[,] haunt saloons[,] seeking to kill dullness after fever-gold--since no fierce gold-game is played[,] withdraw like wounded animals into some hollow . . . & waste away their remaining years . . .⁴

As will be seen, John Muir's view of the impact of competition on people belonging to the uneducated classes contrasted sharply with his view of its impact on educated people.

In itself, menial labor degraded humans. Herding sheep contributed not only to the degradation of intellectual faculties, but also to moral and spiritual decay. As will be remembered, Muir was disgusted by Billy's failure at personal hygiene and found his lack of appreciation for the natural beauty of the Sierras disappointing. On one occasion Muir tried to convince him to hike to "the brink of the Yosemite for a view." Billy's response could be described as no more than tepid.

. . . I pressed Yosemite upon him like a missionary offering the gospel, but he would have none of it. 'I should be afraid to look over so high a wall,' he said. 'It would make my head swim. There is nothing worth seeing anywhere, only rocks, and I see plenty of them here. Tourists that spend their money to see rocks and falls are fools, that's all. You can't humbug me. I've been in this country too long for that.'⁵

Muir's attempts to fill Billy with the proper regard for the pristine peaks and cliffs around him proved futile. The young shepherd's sense of esthetics was greatly impaired. He was "deaf to all stone sermons."⁶

Though Muir thought herding sheep degraded Billy, something deeper was at work. It is fair to say that he thought Billy was unredeemable from the moment of conception. One may remember Muir's description of the dirt on a couple in the South as being "hereditary." It is significant that Muir described people of all social classes using terms from geology. While Muir depicted the dirt on Billy as holding "no small geological significance," he also described the owner of the sheep using a geologic metaphor.⁷

. . . [Pat Delaney] is one of those remarkable California men who have been overflowed and denuded and remodelled by the excitements of the gold fields, like the Sierra landscapes by grinding ice, bringing the harder bosses and ridges of character into relief--a tall, lean, big-boned, big-hearted Irishman, educated for a priest in Maynooth College--lots of good in him, shining out now and then in this mountain light.⁸

The incessant use of geology to describe people of such disparate characters and appearances suggests that Muir was using geology as a way of imposing order on the human

condition. It also suggests Muir felt human potential was predetermined by nature. Evidence for such a conclusion may be found in several of Muir's recollections. At the end of his summer's work, in 1869, he recorded that Pat Delaney told him would be "famous some day."⁹ Toward the end of his life, Muir cast back and remembered his neighbors in Wisconsin presaging greatness for an awkward and eccentric farm boy: ". . . [I] had been taught to have a poor opinion of myself, as of no account, though all our neighbors encouragingly called me a genius, sure to rise in the world."¹⁰

A careful reading of My First Summer in the Sierra indicates that John Muir was neither objective nor fair in his portrayal of Billy. As the story of the summer unfolded, a palpable tension grew between the young preservationist and the even younger shepherd. At heart, the two would never have felt very comfortable around each other, simply because their value systems were diametrically opposed.

Instead of self-discipline and respect for authority, Billy prized his autonomy, independence, and freedom. As will be remembered, Pat Delaney employed Muir for one simple task, "to see that the shepherd did his duty." Outside of this charge, Muir was almost completely free to wander about the Sierra. It is reasonable to believe Billy resented both Pat Delaney and John Muir: Pat Delaney did not trust him,

and Muir, who was inexperienced at herding sheep, was paid to do nothing but wander the mountains and report back to the boss. By the second week in August these resentments boiled over. One day after arguing "loudly" with Mr. Delaney over how to properly herd sheep, Billy simply packed his duffle and "started for the plains."¹¹

Billy's mode of departure contradicts Muir's statement concerning the degrading effects of shepherding. The lure of wealth hardly held Billy in an isolated subservience to Pat Delaney. With a choice open to submit to Delaney's authority and continue making money, Billy chose instead to reaffirm his autonomy and freedom.

The summer of 1869 inaugurated a five year immersion in the Sierra for John Muir. Historians recognize these years as a period of profound intellectual growth for the preservationist, culminating in intellectual maturity by the time he returned to civilization in 1873. During the period between 1867 and 1873, he established the main tenets of his preservationist philosophy and unerringly stressed a biocentric, versus an anthropocentric, view of nature. Moreover, John Muir soon developed into an eloquent defender of the Yosemite and of America's remaining forests and wildernesses.¹²

He managed to support himself in a number of jobs, including work in a Yosemite Valley sawmill owned by John Hutchings. Plenty of time remained for Muir to engage in more important pursuits--to read exhaustively, hike, and even write and publish his first article. He also served as an unofficial guide for many groups of people visiting the valley. In fact, Muir's five years of withdrawal from civilization were hardly spent in solitude. As has been mentioned, the geologist Ezra Slocum Carr profoundly influenced Muir during the years at the University of Wisconsin. The promising student established a lasting friendship and correspondence with the geologist's wife, Jeanne Carr.¹³

Not long after Muir travelled to California, the Carrs also relocated to California from Madison. An important figure in America's literary and intellectual circles, Jeanne Carr recommended John Muir as a guide to the Sierra when noted scientists, artists, and writers of the day visited California. As a result of Jeanne Carr's influence, Muir led parties from the University of California into the Sierra and corresponded with prominent scientists such as Asa Gray and Louis Agassiz. He also met the eccentric writer Thérèse Yelverton, who was so taken with Muir that she based a major character in one of her novels on him. Through Jeanne Carr, Muir met and formed a strong friendship with the artist William Keith. Most important, Jeanne Carr

ensured Muir had an opportunity to travel and converse with Ralph Waldo Emerson during the summer of 1871. His meeting and conversations with the famous Transcendentalist remained among Muir's fondest memories.¹⁴

The decade of the 1870s marked a period of gradual, but irreversible, transition for John Muir. The early years were spent predominantly in the Sierra. As the decade wore on, however, he moved toward a more settled lifestyle. In 1879 he became engaged to Louisa Strentzel, the daughter of a wealthy fruit farmer in California's Contra Costa County. Before marrying, Muir took the first of several trips to Alaska.¹⁵

Following his return, John Muir married Louisa and took over the supervision of the family's large farm. Louisa's father, John Strentzel, pioneered the cultivation of fruits and vineyards in California's Alhambra Valley, overseeing the transition of area farms from less-profitable wheat production to an agriculture integrated into America's growing markets. Muir excelled in managing the farm. Whereas his father-in-law experimented with a wide-variety of fruit trees and grapes, Muir carefully selected those species offering the highest return. In addition, he intensely supervised the farm workers--numbering close to forty. These workers were Chinese laborers who travelled from farm to farm, accomplishing a variety of tasks, from picking pears to packing grapes.¹⁶

Muir's dedication to the farm and his growing family (he and Louisa were parents to two daughters) limited the amount of time available for writing and for wilderness travel. However, something more than familial obligation was involved. Records indicate Muir became obsessed with the ranch's operations. In letters, his sister Maggie urged him to hire a foreman so he could travel East and visit with family in Wisconsin.¹⁷ Neighbors in the nearby town of Martinez remembered Muir at this time as aloof, unusually crafty in business, and excessively cheap.¹⁸

The demands of intensive management led to melancholy and physical deterioration. While he was on one of his few trips away from home after taking over ranch operations, his wife Louisa wrote him and urged a break from the grinding pace he had set for himself: "Oh, if you could only feel unhurried and able to rest with no thought of the morrow, next week, or next month, nor of any vineyards and Chinaman!"¹⁹ With the additional encouragement of his friends Muir relinquished his hold on the ranch. In 1891, Muir's sister and brother-in-law--John and Margaret Reid--moved from Nebraska to live on the Muir-Strentzel estate. A few years later, Muir's brother, David, took over management of the farm's agricultural enterprises. With a penchant for efficiency similar to Muir's, David coaxed the land to new heights of production.²⁰

John Muir's management of the Strentzel estate highlights two apparent contradictions between his life and his philosophy. First, one must wonder how he could square his beliefs concerning the degrading nature of physical labor when his own efforts in running the farm were so physically demanding. As with the shepherd's isolating work, John Muir felt the demands of farm management degraded him. Indeed, such a belief led to his relinquishment of such duties so he could again pursue scientific interests and literary projects.²¹

John Muir recognized the need to satisfy the mundane requirements of food and shelter, and he felt strong familial obligations. However, he also felt he had a higher calling to follow literary and scientific pursuits.²² Muir was proudest of his achievements in the areas of geology and botany. In describing himself, he conspicuously omitted his occupation as a farmer. For example, he opened a letter to his editor, Robert Underwood Johnson, in 1889, explaining the constraints supervision of farm laborers placed on his time: "[There are] A horde of oriental heathen besides Swiss Dutch Irish etc--to look after . . ." ²³ Several paragraphs later, when he offered Underwood a general description of himself, John Muir's time-consuming job as a farmer was not mentioned. Instead, he styled himself as a "poetico-trampo-geologist-bot. and ornith-natural,

etc!-!-!"²⁴ For Muir, the exacting demands of farm management could be justified, but only if the wealth accrued from them allowed him to take up the higher pursuits of scientific inquiry and wilderness proselytizing.

A more complex contradiction lies in the fact that John Muir chose to replace the diversity Dr. Strentzel brought to the farm with an intensively managed monoculture. The intensity and thoroughness with which he exploited the farm seems diametrically opposed to the values of diversity and wildness he so stridently espoused. In addition, his fixation with making the farm turn a profit appears hypocritical in light of later attacks on loggers, ranchers, farmers, and sheepmen for their greedy exploitation of National Forest and Park lands. One might ask, "what differentiated John Muir's exploitation of land in the Alhambra Valley from the exploitation of mountainous and forested lands?"

The answer underscores the arbitrary nature of Muir's definition of pristine wilderness. Simply put, the Alhambra Valley did not fit his definition of the Garden. His conception of the Garden was extremely flexible and included everything from forests of the South, to the mountains of the Sierra, to the vast tundra of Alaska. However, integral to all of these was the absence of human manipulation and, particularly, human habitation.

As may be remembered, John Muir's version of the Edenic Narrative deviated from the more common form, outlined by Carolyn Merchant. In the dominant version, technology and civilization would lead to the recreation of The Garden in the form of "civilized" landscapes (orderly farms and pastoral landscapes dotted with shining, industrial cities).²⁵ John Muir celebrated civilization and technological progress as avenues to a better understanding of God; however, he saw The Garden in pristine wilderness.

Human cultivation and pasturage could have an immense, though temporary, effect on the Garden, as is shown in John Muir's book, The Yosemite: "Yosemite was all one glorious flower garden before ploughs and scythes and trampling, biting horses came to make its wide open spaces look like farmer's pasture fields."²⁶ Though Muir dedicated much of his energy as a preservationist to fighting this sort of destruction, he felt nature possessed the power to repair damage inflicted by humans and their domesticated beasts. The examples of nature's healing were everywhere evident. In a Georgian cemetery, during his long walk to the Gulf, John Muir made the following observation.

Part of the grounds was cultivated and planted with live-oak, about a hundred years ago, by a wealthy gentleman who had his country residence here. But much the greater part is undisturbed. Even those spots which are disordered by art, Nature is ever at work to reclaim, and to make them look as if the foot of man had never known them.²⁷

Once more, we are left with the question of what qualities separated the Strentzel estate from the meadows of the Yosemite Valley. If nature could restore both to their original state, why was the exploitation of one acceptable, while the other was seen as desecration? The most obvious difference between the two was not one of physical characteristic but of purpose. From John Muir's perspective, the purpose of the Strentzel estate was to satisfy mundane needs. These included the needs of people who relied on agricultural produce, and on the needs of John Muir's family, who relied on profits from the ranch to maintain a comfortable lifestyle.

The main purpose of Wilderness Gardens was anything but mundane. In his book, My First Summer in the Sierra, Muir emphatically told his readers that in waters of Yosemite "God himself is preaching his sublimest water and stone sermons."²⁸ The human touch and the quest to satisfy mundane needs contaminated the pristine wilderness. In such a contaminated place, the chance to understand God's plan was hindered, as was the quest for spiritual actualization. Exploitation of wilderness lands threatened the spiritual health of the entire nation more profoundly than the destruction of a church: ". . . the hills and groves were God's first temples, and the more they are cut down and hewn into cathedrals and churches, the farther off and dimmer seems the Lord himself."²⁹

Following his transfer of the farm's management to his brother, John Muir embarked on his most productive years of political and literary achievement. This period began roughly in 1891, with the publication of his first book, Our National Forests, and ended in 1914 when he died having nearly completed the manuscript for Alaska Travels.

Though Muir's literary output during these years was impressive, his accomplishments in the political arena were of at least equal significance. In 1892, Muir founded the Sierra Club. With the help of his editor at Century Magazine, Robert Underwood Johnson, he pushed for the establishment of a large federal park to surround the already existing, but diminutive, Yosemite State Park. Following success on this issue, he pushed for the recession of the State Park to the federal government for inclusion in the national park--a goal reached in the year 1905. At the same time, Muir helped promote the establishment of the large Federal Forest Reserves that formed the basis of today's national forests. Additionally, the Sierra Club took an active role in protecting the integrity of these reserves from the political power wielded by a variety of agricultural, mining, and lumbering interests. Finally, Muir led the battle to save Yosemite National Park's Hetch-Hetchy Valley from being inundated by a reservoir. The battle was lost in 1913, but Muir's

efforts provided a foundation for the future defense of parks and national monuments.³⁰

The battles John Muir waged at the end of the nineteenth century and in the dawn of the twentieth century gave his ideas concerning wilderness a political dimension. In all respects, however, John Muir's ideas concerning progress and wilderness remained intact. His advocacy of progress and his identification of wilderness with the original Garden shaped his definitions of allies and foes. Moreover, they determined his selection of an audience for his most political writing.

A difficult task in any battle is separating friend from foe. As Muir campaigned to establish and defend the integrity of Forest Reserves and National Parks, he implemented a simple set of criteria to identify his enemies. From his perspective, the political boundaries around these areas institutionalized his separation of the mundane world from the spiritual space of the Garden. Identifying enemies was straightforward. Enemies were those who would damage, eliminate, or exploit these areas for mundane purposes. In application, this was not as strict an identification as one might suppose. Hotels and roads could be built or retained in these areas under Muir's belief that they were promoting the spiritual discovery of tourists.³¹ But in another sense, Muir's definitions were very uncompromising. Mundane activities within Garden areas, no

matter how long they had supported local livelihoods, were to be discontinued. Consequently, Muir backed the elimination of logging, hunting, sheepherding, and agriculture from Forest Reserves and Parks.³²

In his book, Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness, historian Alfred Runte underscores that, in his focus on eliminating human influences from Yosemite, Muir ignored the long history of manipulation not only by early settlers, but Native Americans as well. In many cases, these influences were key to the existence of those physical features in the park that Muir celebrated to such a high degree. For example, human applied fire played a role in the existence of large meadows crowded with wild flowers.³³

For Muir, the distinction between friend and foe was most problematic in terms of corporations and wealthy individuals. Vital support for Forest Reserves and Parks came from both sources. Historians admit that Muir's battle for the establishment of Yosemite National Park depended heavily upon the support of the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Hearst family.³⁴ Just as importantly, John Muir's notions concerning progress led him to support America's overarching project of industrialization. Corporate leaders led the way in this project. By making the world more efficient, they freed people from the degradation of physical labor and opened the gates for the advance of science. On a personal level, Muir admired and identified

with wealthy individuals because they were educated and possessed interests beyond those connected with the necessity to meet the demands of the mundane world.

John Muir's relationship with the railroad magnate, Edward Harriman, provides an excellent example of his advocacy of industrialism and its leaders. Muir and Harriman became acquainted in 1899 when Muir accompanied a scientific expedition to Alaska sponsored by the railroad tycoon. In the following years the two became close friends and allies. Harriman brought his tremendous political influence to bear when Muir requested help in winning the recession of Yosemite State Park to the Federal Government. During the summer of 1908, Harriman instructed Muir, who always found writing difficult, to come and compose at his summer home on Klamath Lake. There, Harriman thought, Muir might focus more effectively. To further facilitate matters, Harriman ordered his personal stenographer to follow Muir and record every word he uttered.³⁵

Edward Harriman died in 1909, and upon receiving the news, Muir penned a lengthy tribute. It was wild, unchecked, and celebratory--an effusive glorification of Harriman rivaling Muir's most vibrant works on nature.

The greater his burdens, the more formidable the obstacles looming ahead of him, the greater was his enjoyment. He fairly reveled in heavy dynamical work and went about it as naturally and unweariedly as rivers and glaciers making landscapes: building railroads in wildernesses, improving old ones, straightening curves, lowering grades, laying down thousands of miles of heavy

steel, applying safety devices at whatever cost, bringing everybody nearer to one another, making the nation's ways straighter, smoother, safer, more serviceable. The good he did with his roads is far beyond mere philanthropy [sic]. He seemed to regard all the people as partners, setting millions of men to work clearing, ploughing, sowing, irrigating, mining, building cities and factories, and all the benefits derived from his labors in making Nature pour forth her resources for the uses of mankind."³⁶

Through the course of the tribute, Edward Harriman becomes John Muir's version of the ultimate mechanic. As may be remembered from the preceding chapter, Muir believed the mechanic played the critical role of freeing humans from labor, allowing them to come closer to God. The most direct route to God was through science, a guiding light Muir followed throughout life. Like the mechanic, Harriman released humans from mundane pursuits, and through his philanthropy he supported scientific expeditions. Progress was not easily achieved, but required the efficiency and drive of Harriman, who "sympathized with his thousands of employees, paid good wages and studied their welfare, but of course insisted on that strict discipline which is the only way to success. . . ."³⁷

Though Muir admired and identified with people like Harriman, he could not deny that wealthy ranchers and corporate timber interests posed a direct threat to the Forest Reserves and National Parks. Examples of this may be seen in the book Our National Parks (1901).³⁸ Ostensibly a celebration of the nation's parks, this book also advocated

the protection of Forest Reserves. The proposal to reserve forested land in the public domain by creating Forest Reserves in the West had been hotly contested for years. Even after Reserve establishment, a number of powerful ranching, lumbering, and mining interests tried either to eliminate them or, openly and illegally exploit their resources. Through the Sierra Club, Muir worked to promote and protect Forest Reserves.³⁹

In Our National Parks, Muir hinted that the "wealthy" were often responsible for the most heinous abuses of public lands, and thefts of its resources, but he never ventured to make specific accusations. A reading of early drafts of Our National Parks indicates the depth of Muir's inner-conflict in attacking corporate interests. In one passage from a draft Muir complains of corporate lumberman and sheepmen pretending to act in the interest of farmers of small acreage. According to Muir, these wealthy interests, "set forth that each and all of the . . . farmers humbly prayed Congress to deliver them from the disastrous consequences of [the establishment of Yosemite National Park]" ⁴⁰ Muir asserted corporate interests used common people in all such battles: "so it is always complaints are made in the name of poor settlers and miners while the wealthy corporations are kept carefully in the fuzzy background."⁴¹

By the time Our National Parks went to print, the above observations were absent. What was left were passages

characterizing working people in negative terms, suggesting that they, in fact, posed the greatest threat to Forest Reserves and National Parks. For example, a transient woodworker--the shakemaker--personified corruption, greed, and irresponsibility. The shakemaker operated independently, felling and splitting shingles out of huge sugar-pines.

Happy robbers! dwelling in the most beautiful woods, in the most salubrious climate, breathing delightful odours both day and night, drinking cool living water--roses and lilies at their feet in the spring, shedding fragrance and ringing bells as if cheering them on in their desolating work. There is none to say them nay. They buy no land, pay no taxes, dwell in a paradise with no forbidding angel either from Washington or from heaven.⁴²

In the case of squatters and ordinary lumberman, Muir created another image. These, he suggested, were brutish people, laboring through lives one could hardly imagine worth living.⁴³ Muir's portrayals suggest he found it easier to attack the corporate pawns than the corporations themselves. His deeply established biases against the laboring classes, and advocacy of industrial progress, would have made it far more palatable to do so.

The extent to which laborers were the pawns of corporate interests is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is clear that John Muir's observations led him to believe working people, and rural working people in particular, were less likely to appreciate nature than were wealthy urban tourists. People like Billy were completely

hopeless. But even in those rare instances when a laborer demonstrated an innate love of nature, he or she could never presume to understand and appreciate it at a level open to those who had both time and education. As an example, when Muir travelled to the Cassiar gold mines in 1879, he met a miner whose "love for birds and flowers marks him sharply among his companions."⁴⁴ Muir had the opportunity to travel with the miner, Mr. Le Claire, and weathered a storm in his cabin. He admired "the finest respect" with which Le Claire picked and handled a blue forget-me-not. Though kind, Muir's assessment of Le Claire's interest in plants and animals was nonetheless condescending: "Le Claire's simple, childlike love of nature, preserved undimmed through a hard wilderness life, was delightful to see."⁴⁵ The miner fed birds and animals near his cabin. He also held an appreciation for the Alaskan landscape, but he did not possess the depth of knowledge characteristic of the scientifically trained.

Long before meeting Le Claire, John Muir had identified the people who would most likely form a deep appreciation for nature. Though they often came to the valley ignorant of nature's wonders, tourists visiting Yosemite from California's urban areas had both the time and aesthetic sensibility necessary for a proper appreciation of the Park.

We saw another party of Yosemite tourists today. Somehow most of these travellers seem to care but little for the glorious objects about them, though enough to spend time and money and endure long

rides to see the famous valley. And when they 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!⁴⁶

Experience with rural people, like the shepherd Billy, led Muir to grow increasingly pessimistic about their receptiveness to his wilderness gospel. On the other hand, his optimism about urban people increased. In books such as The Mountains of California (1894), Our National Parks (1901), and The Yosemite (1912), the reader can trace an broadened emphasis on tourism. In The Mountains of California, John Muir occasionally mentions sites "pleasure seekers" might be interested in visiting. To a heightened degree, the same is true in Our National Parks.⁴⁷

In his book, The Yosemite, Muir provided detailed descriptions of all the valley's wonders, offered mountain climbing advice, described the area's flora and fauna, and listed the valley's most popular and impressive attractions. He even included detailed descriptions of hotel and camp accommodations. In all dimensions the book fits the requirements of a tourist guide--though dignified by keen nature observations and an undercurrent of wilderness conviction.

For working people, John Muir's vision suggested anything but a vacation. According to historian Samuel Hays, trips to National Parks and Forest Reserves were beyond the means of working-class people during the first

decades of the twentieth century and required more free time than was available to them.⁴⁸ For rural working people, Muir's vision of huge tracts of land maintained in a pristine state for the spiritual and recreational fulfillment of urban elites could hardly have been promising. If work as a shepherd or shakemaker was hard, it at least afforded a measure of freedom and independence. As John Muir somewhat unconsciously pointed out, tourism relegated workers to a more subservient position: "Happy nowadays is the tourist with earth's wonders, new and old, spread invitingly open before him, and a host of able workers as his slaves making everything easy . . ."49

The conception of huge sections of lands set aside essentially for aesthetic, religious, and recreational purposes represented a major departure in Western lands policy. As historian Clayton Koppes has observed, during the nineteenth century the Homestead Act served as an important institution for economic equality.⁵⁰ As long as Western lands were available to homesteading, people could aspire to land ownership. To be sure, the establishment of Forest Reserves at the close of the twentieth century did not preclude homesteading. However, for those who did not yet own land, an implicit threat existed. Nowhere was that threat more explicitly expressed than in John Muir's philosophy--a philosophy that Muir applied equally to Parks

and Forest Reserves. As president of the Sierra Club, Muir issued the following resolution.

Be it resolved that this Club is unalterably opposed to the reduction of the area of any forest reservation. We believe that the interests of the people require that these reservations be extended rather than diminished even to the extent of prohibiting the sale to private parties of any portion of forest land included in the public domain.⁵¹

What is important to note is that John Muir's vision for these lands would completely preclude homesteading--essentially replacing a democratic institution with one dedicated to recreation and spiritual growth. On an economic level, recreation in these parks was available only to those of comparative affluence. The spiritual benefits of the parks were accessible to the esthetically receptive: a predisposition Muir believed was more likely to be found in the urban tourist than in the uneducated worker.

In the end, his vision for the Forest Reserves was supplanted by that of conservationists--most notably, Gifford Pinchot--who advocated multiple use of the resources in the reserves. In comparison to Muir, Pinchot's philosophy contained strong democratic currents. Where Muir attacked lumber corporations and lumbermen for destroying the Garden, Pinchot attacked the inequitable accumulation of capital represented by the sheer size of the lumber corporations. According to Clayton Koppes, Pinchot saw public ownership of forested land as "essential to prevent further monopolization of resources."⁵²

In summary, John Muir believed in human progress through mechanical and scientific advance. However, as a writer at the end of the nineteenth century, he was confronted with the results of America's accelerated industrialization and urbanization. For Muir, the most important of these was the disappearance of untouched pristine wilderness, areas that he identified with the Garden of Eden.

Faced with immediate threats to the existence of areas he found essential to spiritual health and growth, John Muir provided a simplistic critique of society that avoided key questions concerning modernity. To Muir, the destruction of America's primeval forests was not related to the growing demands of booming nineteenth century cities, and certainly not to the scientific and mechanical advances that made this boom possible. Threats to the National Parks and Forest Reserves were simply part of the eternal battle between good and evil.

. . . 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 despoiled. 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.⁵³

John Muir's vision for National Parks and Forest Reserves sounded democratic: "Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play and pray in, where Nature may heal and cheer and give strength to the body and soul alike."⁵⁴ In his writing, however, Muir showed deep bias against urban and rural working-class people. He denied labor a significant role in the progress of civilization, and he denigrated laborers. By attributing their position in society to personal inferiority, he avoided any layered analysis of the social problems facing America in the early twentieth century. From a practical perspective, his vision did not offer places to play and pray in for everyone, but for an urban population with the means and time to make the trip to a National Park or Forest Reserve.

1. John Muir, My First Summer in the Sierra (Boston and Constable, London: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911; reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 198.
2. Ibid.
3. John Muir, Travels in Alaska (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915; reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 760.
4. John Muir, "Days of Gold: Old Miners," Draft fragment [ca. 1899], AMS, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 43.
5. Muir, My First Summer, 244.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 237-238.
8. Ibid., 269.
9. Ibid., 283.
10. John Muir, The Story of my Boyhood and Youth, (The Atlantic Monthly Company, 1912; reprint, Madison and Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 208.
11. Ibid., 265.
12. The exact dates of Muir's intellectual maturation are arbitrary. Dennis Williams cites the dates of 1866-1873 as being the most formative: See 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) 83-84. Frederick Turner considers Muir's five years in the Sierra [1869-1873] as being, "the most significant portion of Muir's intellectual and spiritual life." Frederick Turner, Rediscovering America: John Muir in His Time and Ours (New York: Viking, 1985; reprint, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1985), 183.
13. Linnie Marsh Wolfe's biography, Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir, is especially good in describing Muir's interaction with leading intellectuals and scientists at this time. Linnie Marsh Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1945; reprint, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 129-181.
14. See John Muir, "Autobiographical Sketches: From Leaving University to About 1906," TMs, ca. 1908, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers (1858-1957), edited by Ronald H. Limbaugh

and Kirsten E. Lewis, (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1985), 45. For Muir's meeting with Emerson, see Turner, Rediscovering America, 213-215.

15. Turner, Rediscovering America, 220-63.

16. For general information on the history of Alhambra Valley agriculture and specific information about Dr. John Strentzel's and John Muir's role in its development see Steve M. Burke et. al., Martinez Adobe: John Muir National Historic Site, California, Structure Report (Denver: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, August 1992), 25-27. Both Turner, Rediscovering America, 270, and Thurman Wilkins, Apostle of Nature (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 159-168, offer insight into Muir's managerial qualities. For references to worker's see [Louie Strentzel Muir], to John Muir, L, September 1885, Microfilm Edition of the John Muir Papers, 12.

17. See Margaret Muir Reid, Crete, Nebraska, to John Muir, L, 4 July 1885, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 5.

18. For the reaction of neighbors see P. J. Ryan "The Martinez Years: The Family Life and Letters of John Muir," in The World of John Muir, ed. Lawrence R. Murphy and Dan Collins (Stockton, California: University of the Pacific, 1981), 80. Also, see Wilkins, John Muir, 160.

19. Louie Strentzel Muir, Martinez, California, to John Muir, L, 28 August 1885, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 5.

20. Burke, Martinez Adobe, 31-32.

21. Stephen Fox, John Muir and his Legacy: The American Conservation Movement (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1981), 72-99.

22. Ibid.

23. John Muir, Martinez, California, to Robert Underwood Johnson, L, 13 September 1889, Microfilm Edition of the John Muir Papers, 6.

24. Ibid.

25. Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, paperback edition, edited by William Cronon (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 147-53.

26. John Muir, The Yosemite (New York: The Century Co., 1912); reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books (Seattle: The

Mountaineers, 1992), 671.

27. John Muir, A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916; reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 139.

28. Muir, My First Summer, 260.

29. Ibid., 243-44.

30. For background on the politics of management in Yosemite, I have referred to Alfred Runte, Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 5-99. For a very readable treatment of Muir's activities in the political arena, see Wilkins, Apostle of Nature, 169-252.

31. John Muir, The Yosemite, 706. Also, John Muir, Steep Trails (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918; reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 999-1000.

32. See Alfred Runte, Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 57-66.

33. Ibid.

34. For information on the establishment of Yosemite National Park see Turner, Rediscovering America, 284-287. See pages 330 and 331 for Harriman's role in the recession of Yosemite State Park to the Federal government.

35. For Harriman's influence on recession see Turner, Rediscovering America, 331. Muir's account of his stay at Pelican bay is in John Muir, "Edward Henry Harriman," [Incomplete Draft of Edward Henry Harriman (New York, 1911)], TMs, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 47.

36. Muir, "Edward Henry Harriman," Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 47.

37. Ibid.

38. John Muir, Our National Parks (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1901; reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 591-605.

39. A summary of Forest Reserve history may be found in Harold K. Steen, The U.S. Forest Service: A History (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1976), 26-34. The Muir papers contain documents demonstrating the Sierra Club's role in

defending the Forest Reservations. See John Muir, "Cascade Forest Reservation Resolution," TMs, 1896, in selections from the Sierra Club Papers, 1896-1913, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 51.

40. John Muir, "The National Parks and Forest Reservations," AMs, ca. 1897, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 42.

41. Ibid.

42. Muir, Our National Parks, in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, 601.

43. Ibid., 469-470.

44. John Muir, "From Wrangell up Stickeen, 2d trip to Cassiar mines," Journal, 1879 ca. August 5-28, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 25.

45. Muir, Travels in Alaska, 759.

46. Ibid., 228.

47. John F. Sears stresses the genteel character of nineteenth-century tourism in Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10-12.

48. Samuel Hays, Beauty Health and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985 (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 35.

49. Muir, Steep Trails, 999

50. Clayton R. Koppes, "Efficiency, Equity, Esthetics: Shifting Themes in American Conservation," in The Ends of The Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History, ed. Donald Worster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; reprint, 1989), 235.

51. Muir, "Cascade Forest Reservation Resolution."

52. Koppes, "Efficiency, Equity, Esthetics," 235.

53. Muir, The Yosemite, 714.

54. Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

THE SAVAGE AND THE CIVILIZED: JOHN MUIR'S PERCEPTIONS OF NATIVE AMERICANS

In 1879 John Muir found himself accompanying the missionary S. Hall Young to a village of Hoonah Indians on Admiralty Island, Alaska. As the prows of their canoes cut through the surf, one of their Native guides raised a United States flag to answer another being raised next to the chief's house on the shore. Hall's party, which included several Native guides, was warmly received in the village. After eating lunch, S. Hall Young delivered his usual missionary sermon to the gathered Indians. At chief Kashoto's request, Muir also gave a speech to the Hoonahs. Indicative of his growing comfort with the Indians of Alaska, Muir's speech contained a good measure of humor.

I told them that in some far-off countries, instead of receiving the missionaries with glad and thankful hearts, the Indians killed and ate them; but I hoped, and indeed felt sure, that his people would find a better use for missionaries than putting them, like salmon, in pots for food.¹

During his travels, Muir enjoyed the sense of humor displayed by Native Alaskans as well. He disliked the killing of wild animals and, when on the water, often prevented his guides from shooting ducks by rocking the canoe.² But Muir could not help smiling at the light-

hearted antics of two of his guides when they retrieved a slain fowl:

Chief Kadachan and John amused themselves in throwing stones plashingly near him [the waves washing the duck towards shore], and while pulling on . . . [John's] shirt Kadachan took the duck and teased him by opening the duck's bill and pinching him with it.³

Nevertheless, John Muir was not always comfortable around Native Americans. In this chapter I will explore some of the attitudes he expressed toward different tribes in Alaska and in the States. To do so, I will once again look for the roots of Muir's beliefs in the recovery narrative of Western civilization.

In her essay, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," Carolyn Merchant discussed the Edenic Narrative's role in shaping "Euramerican" perceptions of Native Americans.

The heroic recovery narrative that guided settlement is notable for its treatment of Indians. Wilderness is the absence of civilization. Although most Euramericans seemed to have perceived Indians as the functional equivalent of wild animals, they nevertheless believed the Indian survivors had the potential to be 'civilized' and hence to participate in the recovery as settled farmers. American officials changed the Indians' own origin stories to make them descendants of Adam and Eve; hence they were not indigenous to America.⁴

Merchant suggests that in the mosaic of Euramerican culture, two sharply divergent visions of Native Americans coexisted. That is, European Americans saw Native Americans both as

wild animals and as distinctly human--the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve.

Carolyn Merchant states that Euramericans considered Native Americans "the functional equivalent of wild animals." Surprisingly, such an idea possessed positive connotations for many Europeans and European Americans. Romantic writers in both Europe and America celebrated the primitive throughout the nineteenth century.⁵ In the European literature, and the writing of James Fenimore Cooper, Native Americans became "noble savages," admired for their closeness to nature. In novels, their lack of "civilization" was often associated with a morality superior to that of Europeans.⁶

There were also negative aspects to identifying Indians with wild animals. They could be seen as sub-human savages--violent, uncivilized, and undisciplined. This view helped justify the outright killing of Native Americans and the dispossession of their lands. It should be noted, however, that categorizing Native Americans as "savages" did not automatically mean that the speaker considered them animals. Many nineteenth century European Americans used the term "savage" to describe an inferior type of human being. According to historian Donald Worster, people holding such a perception believed Indians were "so backward that it was impossible to integrate them into civilized society."⁷

John Muir's first experiences with Native Americans occurred during his family's years tilling the Wisconsin soil. These contacts were of a fleeting nature, and his impressions of them were recorded at too late a date to be accepted without question. I hold, therefore, that his first significant contacts with Native Americans did not occur until maturity, after his arrival in California. John Muir's book, My First Summer in the Sierra, opens a window to the impact these meetings had on the formation of his attitudes.

At the beginning of their summer of sheepherding, John Muir and Billy were accompanied by a Digger Indian and a Chinese driver. Muir only referred to the Chinese driver once and betrayed no particular interest in him. Although he never furnished, or possibly never learned, the Digger Indian's name, Muir was intrigued by him. Toward the outset of the trip in June of 1869, the party of drivers and shepherds camped near the Sierra foothills and Muir commented of the Indian, "[He] kept in the background, saying never a word, as if he belonged to another species."⁸ Later in the month, Muir compared Native Americans to animals: "Indians walk softly and hurt the landscape hardly more than the birds and squirrels, and their brush and bark huts last hardly longer than those of wood rats . . ."⁹

Though some readers might squirm at Muir's association of Native Americans with wild animals, it is apparent in the above passages that he felt the association was positive. This view was actually unique to Muir, for he held an appreciation for wild animals and their rights as fellow beings that was shared by very few of his contemporaries. He once went so far as to conjecture that, "if a war of races should occur between the wild beasts and Lord Man, I would be tempted to sympathize with the bears."¹⁰ In the case of Indians, however, one could stretch the uniqueness of Muir's view too far. His identification of Indians with animals made them natural inhabitants of the landscape, a notion that corresponded closely with the popular European and American ideal of Indians as noble savages.

Like the American populace at large, Muir remained divided internally between different conceptions of Native Americans. Following his summer of sheepherding, he sent a letter to his brother, David, and used an image of savage Indians and grizzly bears to make his summer appear more treacherous than it probably was: "Bro. Dave: I have escaped the vindictive paws of the Pi-Ute Indians, and grizzly bears . . . I have a dozen grizzly bear stories to tell you [when we meet in person]."¹¹

Nonetheless, encounters with Native Americans also offered Muir a way to interpret Native Americans as fully

human, the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. One day in mid-June, an Indian woman stopped at the shepherders' camp, possibly on her way to gather edible plants in the high country. As he studied the woman, Muir came to the conclusion that, indeed, Indians were human. Looking at the deeply-soiled calico dress she wore, he thought how strange it was that "mankind alone is dirty."¹² If the dirt gave the woman some sort of nominal status in the human race, however, it also alienated her from the natural world.

Had she been clad in fur, or cloth woven of grass or shreddy bark, like the juniper and libocedrus mats, she might then have seemed a rightful part of the wilderness; like a good wolf at least, or bear. But from no point of view that I have found are such debased fellow beings a whit more natural than the glaring tailored tourists we saw that frightened the birds and squirrels.¹³

It is important to remember that, for Muir, dirt was physical evidence of the human Fall from Grace. Although his assessments seem denigrating, they also made Native Americans familiar to him. They were not frightening or exotic. They were not much different than Billy or the poor people he had met in the South.

It would be a mistake to conclude that John Muir's attitude towards Native Americans followed a straight evolutionary path. As mentioned above, Carolyn Merchant characterized Euramericans during the nineteenth century as seeing Native Americans as both wild animals and as the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. So it was with John Muir; he tended to collect attitudes toward Native Americans rather

than advance cleanly from one attitude to the next. In the following observations, made in August, 1869, one can detect a struggle occurring within Muir over the naturalness of Native Americans.

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.¹⁴

Though Muir would not completely abandon his view of Native Americans as natural inhabitants of the wilderness, he more consistently found Indians in the United States to be either savages or humans "not a whit more natural in their lives than we civilized whites."¹⁵ Inclusion in the fellowship of man meant, however, that Native Americans carried the stigma of the Fall. It followed that Native Americans engaged in subsistence activities were as incongruous in John Muir's Garden Temples as were shepherds and shakemakers.

By far the closest and most continuous contact John Muir enjoyed with Native Americans occurred during his various adventures in Alaska. As with his first summer of shepherding, John Muir's first extensive wanderings in Alaska, during 1879, provided his most brilliant impressions of both Alaskan landscapes and their native inhabitants. He delayed his marriage to Louisa Strentzel to take the trip.

and along with another excursion to Alaska immediately following their marriage, it marked the end of true wilderness immersions for the preservationist.

Several historians have understood Muir's trip to Alaska in 1879 as a watershed event. Richard Fleck, in his book Henry Thoreau and John Muir among the Indians, proposes that Muir came to a profound understanding of Indian cultures at this time: "[Muir] would evolve and change from his somewhat ambivalent stance toward various Indian cultures to one of positive admiration after he overcame culture shock."¹⁶ From my perspective, Fleck makes a critical mistake in treating John Muir's attitude toward Native Americans as following a neat evolutionary path. While it is true that John Muir formed an appreciation for the culture of Alaskan Indians, it is equally evident that he never abandoned his negative attitudes toward Native Americans as a whole. Long after his trips to Alaska, he continued to see Indians as both savages and as depraved human beings bearing the marks of the Fall. Moreover, his appreciation of Native Alaskan culture was essentially patronizing--in Muir's mind, Western science, culture, technology and religion remained the pinnacle of human ambition and achievement.

Evidence supporting the assertion that Muir's attitudes toward Native Americans did not evolve in a linear fashion may be garnered from a quick sampling of his publishing

history. In writing books, Muir relied heavily on the detailed journals he kept throughout his life. Though he made stylistic and grammatical revisions, the books retained the flavor and the essential content of the journals.

A comparison of unedited journals (for 1879) and Muir's work, Travels in Alaska, published in 1915, show no significant alteration in the representations of gold miners or Alaskan Indians. Though Muir's original journals for his summer of sheepherding no longer exist, early drafts of My First Summer in the Sierra, 1911, indicate his finished work was also an accurate reflection of original perceptions and experiences. It is possible the author wished to provide an authentic, unedited, portrait of himself at various stages in life. In the case of Native Americans, he thus retained grotesquely-biased characterizations even though he had supposedly come to a much more profound understanding of them. I find it more plausible to believe Muir's views of Native Americans were not substantially different between journal entry and book publication. That is, they had not evolved enough to give him the conviction necessary to revise his work and portray Native Americans in a more favorable light.¹⁷

Muir's book recording his Alaska expedition, Travels in Alaska, is based almost completely on the journals he kept at the time. As in My First Summer of the Sierra, Muir's initial impressions of the people he met in Alaska were

gauged by their levels of cleanliness. Observing Indian women and children at store-fronts in Wrangell village, Muir wrote, "every other face [was] hideously blackened, a naked circle around the eyes, and perhaps a spot on the cheek-bone and the nose where the smut had been rubbed off."¹⁸

The reader anticipates that Muir will categorize the Alaskan Indians in the same manner as he had poor whites and California Indians. However, as he continued to travel it was the naturalness and cleanliness of Alaskan Indians that began to strike Muir. In his descriptions of the landscape, Native Americans fit in as naturally as any wild animal.

The warm air throbs and makes itself felt as a life-giving, energizing ocean, embracing all the landscape, quickening the imagination, and bringing to mind the life and motion about us--the tides, the rivers, the flood of light streaming through the satiny sky; the marvellous abundance of fishes feeding in the lower ocean; the misty flocks of insects in the air; wild sheep and goats on a thousand grassy ridges; beaver and mink far back on many a running stream; Indians floating and basking along the shores; leaves and crystals drinking in the sunbeams; and glaciers on the mountains, making valleys and basins for new rivers and lakes and fertile beds of soil.¹⁹

For the most part, Muir found the Indians of Alaska cleaner than the Indians he had met in California. Despite the cold temperatures, he noticed these Indians bathed on a comparatively frequent basis.²⁰ Moreover, he admired the attention his guides paid to personal grooming when they neared a village of the highly respected Chilcat Indians.²¹

Muir found other indications that the Native Americans of Alaska differed not only from the Indians of California

but also from European Americans. It was not just that the Indians were cleaner, but so were their animals. During his 1881 trip to Alaska, Muir characterized the Chukchi's reindeer in a way that contrasted dramatically with his descriptions of befouled domestic sheep: "[The reindeer] seem as smooth and clean and glossy as if they were wild. Taming does not seem to have injured them in any way. I saw no mark of man upon them."²²

Still, John Muir was wary of denying Indians membership in the human race. At the village of Kake Indians, Muir recorded the reaction of a child to the sermon of his missionary friend, S. Hall Young:

A little girl, frightened by the strange exercises, began to cry and was turned out of doors. She cried in a strange, low, wild tone, quite unlike the screech crying of the children of civilization.²³

It is significant that Muir did not characterize the child's cry as resembling that of a wild animal. The most important thing distinguishing this child from other children was her lack of civilization. Consequently, it appears the author categorizes the girl as a human, as opposed to a sub-human, savage. But Muir did not feel comfortable calling Native Alaskans "savages," as can be seen in his following description of the Chukchis.

The Chukchis seem to be good-natured, lively, chatty, brave, and polite people, fond of a joke, and, as far as I have seen, fair in dealings as any people, savage or civilized. They are not savage by any means, however, but steady, industrious workers . . .²⁴

The above passage encourages the reader to conclude that the Chukchis were civilized. However, as will be demonstrated, Muir was not ready to accord Alaskan civilization a status commensurable to that of the Western world.

Accepting Alaskan Natives as fully civilized human beings--independent of any Western influence--threatened the foundations of Muir's philosophy and the Christian iconography upon which his wilderness ideals were built. If he accepted the premise that all people descended from Fallen Adam and Eve, he must also accept that they all exhibited the marks of the Fall, alienating them from the original Garden. However, John Muir found the marks of the Fall absent among the Alaskan Natives, except in those villages where they had been exposed to the products and vices of civilization (for example, alcohol and alcoholism).²⁵

Two logical options were open to Muir. He could unambiguously place Native Alaskans in the company of innocent animals, or he could shift the foundations of his philosophy and blame civilization rather than innate human faults for the corruption of individuals. The second option would necessarily replace notions of original sin: humans would be born innocent and would remain so until corrupted by civilization. It should not be surprising that Muir would reject such a notion. His faith in the advance of Western Civilization, and his deeply held belief in original

sin, prevented him from accepting that human corruption owed its existence to civilization.

Logic also prevented John Muir from unequivocally separating Native Americans from the rest of humanity and placing them in the animal world. They were simply too much like himself. Looking at a group of Chukchi boys in 1881, Muir felt "that there was a response in their eyes which made you feel that they were your very brothers."²⁶

Muir found a way out of this dilemma by understanding Alaskan Natives as children. In doing so, he was utilizing a well-worn European conception of Native Americans. Indeed, the identification of Indians with children dates back to early encounters between the Spanish and Native Americans. Such an identification was popular with Spanish friars. Portraying the Indians as children helped sanction and support their continuing presence in New Spain as protectors of the Indians against exploitation and depredation at the hands of secular Spaniards.²⁷ In the second half of the nineteenth century, the word "child" provided a close synonym for the Indian's "official" position in relationship to the Federal government: In nineteenth century documents, the government was "guardian" of its Native American "wards."²⁸

For John Muir, characterizing Native Alaskans as children allowed him to set aside concerns over the deleterious impacts of civilization. It also helped resolve

the issue of original sin. The innocence of children is a well-known tenet of Christianity and one that meshed well with both the physical cleanliness and the moral superiority John Muir found in Alaskan Natives.

A study of the different Eskimo faces, while important trades were pending, was very interesting. They are better behaved than white men, not half so greedy, shameless, or dishonest. I made a few sketches of marked faces. One, who received a fathom of calico more than was agreed upon, seemed extravagantly delighted and grateful. He was lost in admiration of the Captain, whose hand he shook heartily.²⁹

Like the miner Le Claire, the Alaskan Natives possessed a particularly innocent, if unsophisticated, love of nature. During his first visit to Alaska, Muir and his Indian guides gathered around a campfire in the evening. As they sat a distance from the flames, Muir noted the guides' interest in the stars: "the brightness of the sky brought on a long talk with the Indians about the stars; and their eager, childlike attention was refreshing to see . . ."³⁰

From John Muir's perspective, the culture of Native Americans also supported his understanding of them as children, especially in comparison with European Americans. In every area where he compared the two, he found the civilization of Native Americans at least somewhat inferior to that carried by European Americans. More precisely, he usually compared their level of civilization favorably to that of the lowest classes of European Americans--leaving

implied the conclusion that they did not belong in the vanguard of civilization.

One measuring stick Muir used to evaluate the sophistication of civilization was that of superstition. Muir's education and his religious upbringing both stressed the value of rational thought and the scientific method.³¹ As a consequence, he held superstition incompatible with civilization. During his walk through the Southern States he treated the superstition of an African American in the South in a jocular but condescending manner.³² John Muir found absolutely intolerable any such irrationality among educated European Americans. During his early years in California, he had been tricked into attending a seance. He refused to participate and, before leaving, took the time to ridicule the people involved in conjuring up spirits.³³ Alaskan Indians, Muir found to his pleasure, were comparatively free of such superstition.

Though all the Thlinkit tribes believe in witchcraft, they are less superstitious in some respects than many lower classes of whites. Chief Yana Taowk seemed to take pleasure in kicking the Sitka bones that lay in his way, and neither old nor young showed the slightest trace of superstitious fear of the dead at any time.³⁴

In matters religious, the Native Alaskans held beliefs similar to Muir's. Overall, their view of the world in biocentric terms complimented his own views of nature and buttressed his repeated attacks on anthropocentrism. Nevertheless, Muir's travels with S. Hall Young were part of

a missionary effort, and despite his respect for specific Native American traditions, he never questioned the ultimate goal of converting them to Christianity.³⁵

As much as science, Christianity held a place at the forefront of Western progress. At the end of their stay at a village of Chilcats, Muir and Young attended a prayer meeting. A shaman, whom Muir described as "old" but "dignified," concluded an eloquent speech with the following words: "'Hereafter, I will keep silent and listen to the good words of the missionaries, who know God and the places we go to when we die so much better than I do.'"³⁶ Muir recorded nearly identical words from a Stickeen Chief named Shakes at Fort Wrangell. In Shakes' speech, Muir underscored profound similarities between Native American conceptions of atonement and those of the Judeo-Christian tradition.³⁷

As a result of his travels, Muir believed the Tlinkit Indians were the most advanced of all. Like the Chilcat shaman and Stickeen Chief, these people readily accepted Christianity.

In a general view of the wild races of mankind with reference to the efforts of missionaries in converting them to [the] Christian religion, I was surprised to find that most heartily of all the Tlinkit welcomed the coming of Christian missionaries.³⁸

The message was clear: Alaskan Natives recognized the superiority of European culture and, because their religious

traditions were similar, they would convert easily to Christianity.

Skill in building and art also served as a means to compare Alaskan and European cultures. The totem poles and buildings of an abandoned Stickeen village so impressed Muir he considered them, "astonishing as belonging to Indians."³⁹ Later, he offered a critique of skills exhibited by Alaskan Natives in general: "In good breeding, intelligence, and skill in accomplishing whatever they try to do with tools they seem to me to rank above most of our uneducated white labourers."⁴⁰

Considering Muir's experience as a wood-worker and inventor, the above observations possess authority. However, he did not understand Native American culture sufficiently to pass judgement on the aesthetic quality of Native architecture and crafts; any symbolism without a close correlation to Western European tradition would have been lost on him. Consequently, it is not surprising that Muir declined to rank Native American works with those produced by "civilization's" finer craftsmen.⁴¹

Understanding Native American culture without applying the standards and values of his own culture proved impossible for Muir. And yet, if doing so blinded him to the complexities of Native cultures and relegated them to a status beneath his own, it also made him far more comfortable around the Indians of Alaska than he had been

with California Indians. In both instances, he gained a level of familiarity by comparing them to the uneducated working classes. In the case of California Indians this meant a comparison to the dirtiest, most undisciplined, laborers. For Alaskan Indians, cleanliness and industriousness provided the basis for a resemblance to the best workers--those who were sober, skilled, and simple.

John Muir's association of Native Americans with different classes of workers also indicates his support for the "corporate order" of the late-nineteenth century. His first two trips to Alaska were made in 1879 and 1881, respectively. The two dates framed his marriage to Louisa Strentzel and assumption of management of the Strentzel estate. They also came at the end of a decade of crisis in American life. Author Richard Slotkin has argued that the 1870s brought to a head conflict between "the will and desires of a 'lower' human order or class . . . and the new industrial system as defined by its owners and managers."⁴²

The conflict pitted two sharply contrasting ideologies. As Slotkin points out, the new managerial system "required the willing subordination of worker to manager, and of private ambition to corporate necessity."⁴³ Such subordination, however, clashed with the "political ideology of 'free labor' for whose vindication the Civil War had been fought."⁴⁴ Slotkin identifies three crises that threatened the managerial order during the 1870s: Labor "riots" and

strikes, the threat of race war in the South, and the Indian wars of the 1870s. One event, in particular, came to stand symbolically for conflict in all three arenas.

The events of the Sioux War of 1876, culminating in Custer's Last Stand, were treated as a paradigm of the disaster that might overtake civilization as we know it' if moral authority and political power were conceded to a class of people whose natural gifts were like those of 'redskin savages.' The basic link between White workers, Blacks, and Indians was their common resistance to the managerial disciplines of industrial labor and to the Malthusian discipline of the labor market-place, which required men to 'work or starve' and to accept starvation wages when the market decreed them.⁴⁵

From John Muir's perspective, there were two kinds of laborers: those who accepted managerial discipline, and workers such as Billy and California shakemakers who valued individual freedom above both corporate and individual discipline. The uncouth habits and freedom of California Indians corresponded directly with those of the threatening, undisciplined worker. Conversely, Alaskan Natives who were clean in their habits and functioned as reliable guides, posed no threat to Muir, personally, or to the managerial order.

John Muir did not see a blue-print for a relationship between humans and their environment in Native Alaskan culture. During his 1881 trip to Alaska, he watched polar bears being shot as they swam near the decks of the steamer he travelled on. Sport hunting had always raised Muir's

temper, but the sight of the magnificent white bears being skinned on deck, their bloody carcasses flung overboard to sink into the dark waters, left him livid.

The Eskimos hunt and kill them [polar bears] for food, going out to meet them on the ice with spears and dogs. This is merely one savage living on another. But how civilized people, seeking for heavens and angels and millenniums, and the reign of universal peace and love, can enjoy this red, brutal amusement, is not so easily understood.⁴⁶

Muir's criticism of this slaughter showed him at his passionate best, but it also left no doubt that he ranked civilization's noble impulses far above Native relationships with the land and the animals they hunted. It also displayed his reluctance to throw out a definition of Native Americans as savages. Finally, the above passage illustrates Muir's rigid separation of mundane activities from the spiritual realm. Since he could not see spiritual qualities in his own efforts to satisfy earthly needs, he ignored the possibility that, for Eskimos, hunting possessed a spiritual dimension.⁴⁷

Besides skill, Muir also judged the efficiency of Alaskan Indians. At the end of his record of the 1879 expedition, he wrote a short chapter entitled "Alaska Indians." In these pages, the author evaluated the efficiency of the Alaskan Indians and alluded to a genetic divide separating them from most other American Indians.

It was easy to see that they differed greatly from the typical American Indian of the interior of this continent. They were doubtless derived from the Mongol stock. 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.⁴⁸

Muir's failure to identify any similarities between the culture of Alaskan Indians and the Indians he encountered in the contiguous United States often goes unacknowledged by historians. Although he recognized that the Alaskan Indians took a biocentric view of the world, he failed to infer that this might also be an important aspect of other Native American Cultures. Instead, he suggested a genetic divide separated the Alaskan Indians from the continental Indians. Future travels convinced Muir that the New Zealand Maoris shared a similar, and superior, ancestry with the Tlinkit Indians of Alaska.⁴⁹

It seems a bit uncharitable to point out the limits of Muir's insight into Native culture during his Alaskan visits. There is little doubt in my mind that these trips tested Muir's beliefs on a fundamental level. Conceding that his characterization of Alaskan Natives as children was deeply patronizing and limiting, I believe it also pushed Muir into a period of genuine concern, unfortunately short-lived, about the future of Native American peoples.

During his 1881 trip to Alaska on the steamer Thomas Corwin, John Muir and the ship's crew visited several

villages on the island of Saint Michael. The Indians in the villages had been decimated by famine in the winter of 1878-79, and when John Muir visited them, the villages were empty and quiet, save for the bones of those who perished. From Muir's perspective, the famine was the result of contact with European Americans.

About two hundred perished here, and unless some aid be extended by our government which claims these people, in a few years at most every soul of them will have vanished from the face of the earth; for, even where alcohol is left out of the count, the few articles of food, clothing, guns, etc., furnished by the traders, exert a degrading influence, making them less self-reliant, and less skillful as hunters. They seem easily susceptible of civilization, and well deserve the attention of our government.⁵⁰

Though John Muir's concern for the Alaskan Natives was sincere, his interest extended only as far as saving individual lives. It did not include their culture. For, while he claimed to respect their beliefs, he still considered Western civilization superior to that of Native Alaskans.

Unfortunately, John Muir's concern for the lives of Alaskan Natives did not carry to other Native Americans living south of Alaska. As stated above, he suggested a genetic divide between certain Alaskan Natives and those of the continent's interior. On reading Muir's writing on Native Americans in the West, following his first trips to Alaska, it becomes apparent that Muir internalized this

notion of a genetic divide. The following description of Mono Indians published in his book, The Mountains of California (1894), aptly illustrates Muir's return to his more typical characterizations of Native Americans.⁵¹

At length, as I entered the pass, the huge rocks began to close all around in all their wild, mysterious impressiveness, when suddenly, as I was gazing eagerly about me, a drove of gray hairy beings came in sight, lumbering toward me with a kind of boneless, wallowing motion like bears.

I never turn back, though often so inclined. . . . I soon discovered that although as hairy as bears and as crooked as summit pines, the strange creatures were sufficiently erect to belong to our own species. They proved to be nothing more formidable than Mono Indians dressed in the skins of sage rabbits. . . .

Occasionally a good countenance may be seen among the Mono Indians, but these, the first specimens I had seen, were mostly ugly, and some of them altogether hideous. The dirt on their faces was fairly stratified, and seemed so ancient and so undisturbed it might almost possess a geological significance. The older faces were, moreover, strangely blurred and divided into sections by furrows that looked like the cleavage-joints of rocks, suggesting exposure on the mountains in a cast-away condition for ages. Somehow they seemed to have no right place in the landscape, and I was glad to see them fading out of sight down the pass.⁵²

Though reproducing many familiar themes, the above passage also contains something new. For the first time, Muir took care in noting the harmless nature of the Indians: "They proved to be nothing more formidable than Mono Indians . . ." This is significant because, in 1894, Muir had only recently re-entered the literary world after years of absence. He was embarking on a period in his life defined

by sustained advocacy and defense of America's parks and Forest Reserves.

In an essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness," contemporary historian William Cronon has traced how the terror early Puritans felt for the "wilderness" slowly evolved into the admiration for wild places held by nineteenth century Transcendentalists. Cronon found that in the Transcendentalist's reverence for the sublime a strong current of Puritan terror remained. Although nature was profound, there was also something horrible and imposing in its power. According to Cronon, this terror began to subside dramatically in "the second half of the eighteenth century."

As more and more tourists sought out the wilderness as spectacle to be looked at and enjoyed for its great beauty, the sublime in effect became domesticated. The wilderness was still sacred, but the religious sentiments it evoked were more those of a pleasant parish church than those of a grand cathedral or a harsh desert retreat. The writer who best captures this late romantic sense of a domesticated sublime is undoubtedly John Muir, whose descriptions of Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada reflect none of the anxiety or terror one finds in earlier writers.⁵³

Cronon's assessment is especially valid when applied to Muir's years of park and Forest Reserve advocacy.

Starting with The Mountains of California, Muir specifically targeted tourists as his audience. As has already been mentioned, in books such as Our National Parks (1901), and The Yosemite (1912), he went to great lengths to describe the most spectacular sights tourists might visit,

recommending camping trips they should take, and informing them as to where accommodations might be secured. Wishing to foster the public's appreciation for the Forest Reserves and parks, he advocated improved access and lodging.

Writing for a crowd unaccustomed to life outside the city, Muir also tried to allay fears of dangerous animals and rampaging Indians. In Our National Parks, he assured readers that Indians need no longer be feared in the Black Hills Forest Reserve:

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 peacefully open.⁵⁴

Similarly, Muir observed that the Blackfeet and Bannocks, who once frequented Yellowstone and its environs, were gone: "No scalping Indians will you see."⁵⁵ Throughout the West, the story was the same: "As for Indians, most of them are dead or civilized into useless innocence."⁵⁶

In his two works, The Yosemite and Our National Parks, Muir includes a substantial amount of history concerning Native Americans. He focusses on dramatic events from the period of contact with European Americans. As with lines assuring tourists that Indians no longer posed a threat, these passages were meant to appeal to a large, middle-class, urban audience. In both cases, Muir's writing reflects popular ideas and portrayals of the day concerning Native Americans and frontier figures such as trappers.⁵⁷

Performers, artists, and writers at the turn of the century were caught up in the process of romanticizing the lives of Native Americans and the Western Frontier. Simultaneous with this romanticization, most artists and writers portrayed them as a "vanishing race." The few remnants of the once great Indian nations, it was thought, were bound to disappear from the earth altogether within a short space of time.⁵⁸

Dictating his memoirs at Edward Harriman's summer home in 1908, Muir cast back for childhood memories of Scotland and growing up on Wisconsin farms. These reminiscences would form the basis for The Story of My Boyhood and Youth. In this book, Muir remembered an incident on the farm in which his father argued with a neighbor, Mr. Mair, over the removal of Indians from their native lands. Muir's father felt European American farmers put the land to far better use than Indians, while Mr. Mair contested the injustice of dispossessing them of their lands. Looking back over the decades, Muir remembered his thoughts concurring with those of Mr. Mair.

And I well remember thinking that Mr. Mair had the better side of the argument. It then seemed to me that, whatever the final outcome [of the conflict between European Americans and Native Americans] might be, it was at this stage of the fight only an example of the rule of might with but little or no thought to the right or welfare of the other fellow . . .⁵⁹

In light of Muir's views of Indians during his time in the Sierras and other memories documented in My Boyhood and Youth, such early sentiments seem unlikely. For the balance of his life, it not his life entire, he resisted notions that Native Americans were equals. As with the majority of European Americans, his sympathy for the Indians grew only after their lifestyle was lost forever.⁶⁰

1. John Muir, Travels in Alaska, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1915); reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 784.
2. Ibid., 806.
3. John Muir, "1st Alaska Trip," AMs, October 1879 to December 14, TMs by William F. Badé, ca. 1915, page 6, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 26.
4. Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as Recovery Narrative," in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, paperback edition, edited by William Cronon (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 144.
5. Roderick Nash, Wilderness and the American Mind, 3d ed., (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 47-50.
6. Ibid., 169-70.
7. Donald Worster, An Unsettled Country: Changing Landscapes of the American West (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 70. Also, see Calvin Martin, "An Introduction Aboard the Fidèle," in The American Indian and the Problem of History, ed. Calvin Martin (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 3-26. Martin discusses nineteenth-century genteel "Indian hating" as it is presented in Herman Melville's The Confidence Man: His Masquerade (1857). In addition, he considers the problems writing "Indian history" has presented to historians past and present.
8. John Muir, My First Summer in the Sierra (Boston and Constable London: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911); reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 193.
9. Ibid., 210.
10. John Muir, A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916); reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1922), 155.
11. John Muir, near La Grange, to David Gilrye Muir, L, 24 September 1869, Microfilm Edition of the John Muir Papers (1858-1957), edited by Ronald H. Limbaugh and Kirsten E. Lewis, (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1985), 2.

12. Muir, My First Summer, 211.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid., 266.
15. Ibid., 273.
16. Richard F. Fleck, Henry Thoreau and John Muir among the Indians (Hamden Connecticut: Archon Books, 1985), 42.
17. For Travels in Alaska, I consulted John Muir, "1st Alaska Trip," AMS Journal, October 1879 to December 14, TMs by William F. Badé, ca. 1915, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 26; and John Muir, Journals and Sketchbooks 1876-1879, AMS, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 25. For My First Summer in the Sierra, I examined John Muir, "Sierra Journal Summer of 1869," ca. 1887, AMS (notebook), ["Early draft of My First Summer in the Sierra, 3 volumes prepared ca. 1887 from missing original 1869 journal"], Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 31.
18. Muir, Travels in Alaska, 735.
19. Ibid., 739.
20. John Muir, The Story of My Boyhood and Youth (The Atlantic Monthly Company, 1912); reprint, (Madison and Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 152.
21. Muir, Travels in Alaska, 797.
22. John Muir, The Cruise of the Corwin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917); reprint, (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1993), 166.
23. Muir, Travels in Alaska, 779.
24. Muir, Cruise of the Corwin, 165.
25. For Muir's observations on the impact of alcohol on a Hootsenoo village see Travels in Alaska, 781-82.
26. Muir, Cruise of the Corwin, 55.
27. Robert F. Berkhofer considers the continued impact of early Spanish contact on European conceptions of Indians. See Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., The Wite Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1978), 10-12. For the motivations of Spanish Friars in characterizing Indians as children see Robert Ricard, The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-

1572 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 232; 290-92.

28. Berkhofer, The White Man's Indian, 164; 170-73.

29. Ibid., 53.

30. Muir, Travels in Alaska, 792.

31. John Muir's father was a follower of the Protestant sect known as the Campbellites. For a discussion of the debt Campbellism owed to rationalist and enlightened thought see Sydney E. Ahlston, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972; reprint, 1973), 449.

32. Muir, A Thousand Mile Walk, 136.

33. John Muir, "Autobiographical Sketches: From Leaving University to About 1906," TMs, ca. 1908, page 453, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 45.

34. Muir, Travels in Alaska, 779.

35. Most biographers note the similarities between Muir's biocentrism and Native American religions. The following note is a reference to just one: Stephen Fox, John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1981), 364.

36. Muir, Travels in Alaska, 799.

37. Ibid., 812.

38. Muir, "Autobiographical Sketches," page 353.

39. Ibid., 754.

40. Ibid., 784.

41. Richard Drinnon considers the problem of evaluating Native American "art" from a European perspective in "The Metaphysics of Dancing Tribes," in The American Indian and the Problem of History, ed. Calvin Martin (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 110.

42. Richard Slotkin, The Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America (Atheneum, 1992; reprint, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993), 18-19. Also, see Richard Slotkin, The Fatal Environment: the Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization, 1800-1890 (New York: Atheneum, 1985), 433-532.

43. Slotkin, The Gunfighter Nation, 19.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 19-20.
46. Muir, The Cruise of the Corwin, 128.
47. For an idea of the mythic and spiritual role hunting played in Native American cultures, see Calvin Martin, Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 118-122.
48. Muir, Travels in Alaska, 810-11.
49. Richard Fleck's work is especially notable in its failure to distinguish between Muir's attitudes toward Alaskan Indians and his attitudes toward Native Americans in California, Wisconsin, and the West: Henry Thoreau and John Muir, 28. Muir's comparison of Tlinkit and Maoris appears in John Muir, "Autobiographical Sketches: From Leaving University to About 1906," TMs, ca. 1908, Microform Edition of the John Muir Papers, 45.
50. Muir, Cruise of the Corwin, 88.
51. The following quote portrays a scene that Muir also includes in My First Summer, 270-71. The two versions of the scene are very similar, but slight alterations indicate that Muir went over them before the publication of both books.
52. John Muir, The Mountains of California (New York: Century, 1894); reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 334.
53. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, paperback edition, edited by William Cronon (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 75.
54. John Muir, Our National Parks (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1901; reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 464.
55. Ibid., 479.
56. Ibid., 470. Muir's writing here closely correlates with popular conceptions of Native Americans as belonging to a "vanishing race." See Berkhofer, Jr., The White Man's Indian, 29-31.

57. Examples of Muir's romantic view of history may be found in Our National Parks, 479, and The Yosemite (New York: The Century Co., 1912; reprinted in The Eight Wilderness Discovery Books, Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1992), 702-705.

58. For a treatment of the romanticization of Native Americans in art, refer to William H. Goetzmann and William N. Goetzmann, The West of the Imagination (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 206-34.

59. Muir, Boyhood and Youth, 175.

60. Berkhofer, Jr., The White Man's Indian, 30.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS

In an essay entitled Equity, Eco-racism and Environmental History, historian Martin V. Melosi notes the parallel nature of the evolution of environmental history and modern environmentalism. Melosi credits the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s with having provided the young field of environmental history with "much of its inspiration."¹ As a result, the values of many environmental activists and environmental historians were similar, if not identical. In its early years the close association between the activists and academics was the cause of some concern:

Since the emergence of environmental history was so strongly influenced by political and social goals of environmental activism in the 1960s and 1970s, some members of the academic community were quick to dismiss it as a 'fad' or to brand it simply as 'advocate history.'²

Although Melosi recognizes problems linked to the close association between activism and history, he remains optimistic about environmental history's future.

I agree with Melosi's optimism; however, the pitfalls of these associations still merit attention. In the case of John Muir, biographers have continued to express close

fellowship with both their subject and the modern environmental movement. For example, an anthology dedicated to analyzing John Muir opens with a poem by Richard Fleck advocating the restoration of the Hetch-Hetchy Valley.³ The last six lines read.

We hike to the foot of Wapama Falls
to catch a misty glimpse of the
real power of this inundated valley,
that other Yosemite the Scotsman
dreamed of saving and we dream of
draining if only we can find a way.

Richard F. Fleck
April 21, 1990

In a more qualified tone, Stephen Fox opens his book on John Muir and the conservation movement by clearly stating his orientation: To make my bias clear at the outset: "I consider myself a conservationist, at least by sympathy if not by affiliation or activity."⁴

My object here is not to criticize Richard Fleck or Stephen Fox for possessing biases and stating them openly. On the contrary, I find their tack admirable in its honesty. However, a bias in favor of the modern environmental movement is common to the majority of critical analysis aimed at Muir and every biography I have encountered. The impact is predictable. As a key founder of the environmental movement, John Muir is portrayed as being far ahead of his time--one who rose above the cultural blinders common to his era to preserve the integrity of irreplaceable natural wonders and ecosystems. In many respects, such a

portrayal is fair. Americans owe an enormous debt to John Muir for his work as a preservationist.

Well-placed recognition aside, it should be conceded that John Muir's biographers have sacrificed accuracy in their eagerness to heap accolades on the preservationist and promote his ideals. This tendency carries several ramifications. Most importantly, biographers have grossly oversimplified conflict surrounding the establishment and protection of Parks and Forest Reserves in the American West. For example, Stephen Fox reduces such conflict to a simple formula.

The campaign for Yosemite set a pattern to be repeated many times in future public quarrels over the environment. At stake: a piece of the natural world. On one side: its defenders, spearheaded by amateurs with no economic stake in the outcome, who took time from other jobs to volunteer time and money for the good fight. On the other side: the enemy, usually joining the struggle because of their jobs, with a direct economic or professional interest in the matter and (therefore) selfish motives. Politics seldom lends itself to such simple morality plays. But environmental issues have usually come down to a stark alignment of white hats and black hats.³

My study of Muir's biases against working class peoples is intended to open the door to a deeper analysis of these conflicts. For John Muir the protection of Yosemite was inseparable from self-interest: preservation helped ensure a place to recreate, pursue spiritual growth, and to make scientific inquiries. No doubt, Muir's advocacy of preservation was also intended to benefit society at large, but he clearly privileged the physical, spiritual, and moral

health of the educated, urban tourist over that of shepherds, shakemakers, and Native Americans.

John Muir's bias against workers raises the question of how great a role class played in the heated disputes over the establishment and protection of Parks and Forest Reserves. A recent essay by Karl Jacoby, "Class and Environmental History: Lessons From 'The War in the Adirondacks,'" demonstrates that turn-of-the-century conservation accentuated deep bifurcations between the classes. In the Adirondacks, an intense tension grew between wealthy urbanites who recreated in the state park and the local poor who made their living from those same lands. Karl Jacoby points out that, with access to political power, urban elites imposed hunting, fishing, and access restrictions that were intended to protect and enhance opportunities for sport. Such restrictions were rarely made with the welfare of the local populace in mind and in some cases threatened their ability to survive. In the Adirondacks, the tension between wealthy urban recreationists and locals, living at or near subsistence levels, built to the point of violence.⁶

As Jacoby notes in his essay, one of the reasons environmental historians have devoted little time to the issue of class in relationship to environmental issues is that "the field's early practitioners unconsciously adopted the class assumptions of the late-nineteenth-century

conservationists about whom they were writing."⁷

Fortunately, the trend now seems to be in the opposite direction, with an increasing number of studies devoted to the issue of class and its relationship to recreation, work, and resources in the West.⁸

John Muir's bias against uneducated laborers suggests that conflict over Western Parks and Forest Reserves was not simply an affair of "black hats" versus "white hats." Park status certainly threatened local workers with displacement. Furthermore, John Muir's relationship to Billy implies a deep division between his values and those of local Westerners: Muir valued order above all else, while Billy strongly valued his independence and freedom. Needless to say, the extent to which laborers and small producers were impacted by the establishment of Parks and Forest Reserves warrants more attention than is available in the space of this thesis.

The impact of John Muir's wilderness philosophy on the lives of Native Americans has received notice in recent years. Historian Mark Spence has traced the removal of Native Americans from Yosemite and Glacier National Parks. Unlike many other Parks, the Yosemite supported a community of Native Americans up until the 1950s (though Park policies had been restricting their activities and reducing their numbers in the park since the turn of the century). According to Spence, Muir's portrayal of Native Americans as

dirty and "unnatural" inhabitants of the wilderness contributed to their removal. With other writers, Muir helped establish a popular image of wilderness as, "an empty, uninhabited, primordial landscape that has been preserved as God first intended it to be."⁹ Spence's work serves as an important corrective and highlights the mixed nature of John Muir's legacy.

Less clear is the legacy of John Muir's bias against working class people and his movement within the circles of California's intellectual and economic elite. As the twentieth century draws to a close, the environmental movement has come under increased scrutiny for exhibiting elitist tendencies. Authors such as Mark Dowie and Robert Gottlieb have thoroughly lampooned the nation's largest environmental organizations for remaining "stubbornly elitist."¹⁰ According to Dowie, this elitism has seriously hampered the movement.

American land, air, and water are certainly in better shape than they would have been had the movement never existed, but they would be in far better condition had environmental leaders been bolder; more diverse in class, race, and gender; less compromising in battle; and less gentlemanly in their day-to-day dealings with adversaries.¹¹

Some of the charges Dowie levels against the modern environmental movement also resonate when placed against Muir's activities. For example, when Mark Dowie criticizes the Sierra Club of the late twentieth century, one is reminded of John Muir's reliance on Edward Harriman and the

Southern Pacific Railroad in winning his major political battles. Dowie is especially critical of the organization for its heavy reliance on corporate donations and for its preference to "negotiate" with corporations rather than to use tactics of direct confrontation. The failure of large environmental organizations to win, or even attempt to win, the support of local Western communities in environmental battles brings to mind John Muir's appeals to urban tourists and his biased treatment of Western woodworkers.

With the above considerations in mind, it should come as some surprise that Mark Dowie suggests the environmental movement should return to the traditions of John Muir. In his book, Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century, Dowie predicts a powerful, revitalizing, surge in the environmental movement, a surge he labels as "the fourth wave." This surge, Dowie believes, will break free of the elitist tendencies of previous movements, and will be defined by "a sense of justice."¹²

The fourth wave of American environmentalism will be very American. By all indications, the movement is already well on its way to becoming multiracial, multi-ethnic, multiclass, and multicultural. It also contains many traits that characterized the American Revolution--dogged determination, radical inquiry, a rebellion against economic hegemony, and a quest for civil authority at the grassroots.¹³

Later in his text, Dowie states that the formative ideas of preservationists such as John Muir have much more in common with "the fourth wave," than they do with the leading,

national, environmental organizations of the late twentieth century. In light of John Muir's class and racial biases, I find such a contention completely untenable.

In one sense, it is not surprising that critics of the modern environmental movement fail to examine Muir's thoughts and writing carefully. The tradition of hagiography surrounding the famed preservationist is simply too well-developed; there are few clues in the extant literature to suggest Muir's legacy to the environmental movement was anything but positive. This tendency is unfortunate and will most likely diminish, rather than increase, Muir's relevance to the modern environmental movement. Rather than using Muir's work to understand shortcomings in the modern movement, critical writers tend to restrict themselves to a quick congratulatory nod toward Muir, or to seek direction from entirely different sources. The latter option can yield positive results. For example, Robert Gottlieb's history of the environmental movement sheds light on another important influence on the modern environmental movement: Alice Hamilton. A contemporary of John Muir, Hamilton recognized the importance of the health of urban and industrial environments.¹⁴ This rediscovery of an important environmental leader broadens our understanding of the environmental movement. Nevertheless, John Muir and his contributions seem too rich in their complexity to abandon and, if he is not reduced to the level of idol, his

life and work should still provide insight into both the strengths and weaknesses of the modern environmental movement.

1. Martin V. Melosi, "Equity, Eco-racism and Environmental History," Environmental History Review 19 (Fall 1995), 2.
2. Ibid.
3. Richard F. Fleck, "On Renewing Muir's Dream," poem in John Muir: Life and Work, edited by Sally M. Miller (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), dedication page.
4. Stephen Fox, John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1981), ix.
5. Ibid., 103.
6. Karl Jacoby, "Class and Environmental History: Lessons From 'The War in the Adirondacks,'" Environmental History 2 (July 1997): 324-342.
7. Ibid., 325.
8. For example, Louis Warren's recent book, The Hunter's Game, carefully considers the role of class and race in conflicts over fish and wildlife resources in the West. See Louis Warren, The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997). Richard White studies the relationship between work, recreation, and understandings of the environment in The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995). A related work is Richard White's essay, "'Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?': Work and Nature," in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, paperback edition, edited by William Cronon, 171-85 (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996).
9. Mark Spence, "Dispossessing the Wilderness: Yosemite Indians and the National Park Ideal, 1864-1930" Pacific Historical Review 65 (February 1996): 27-59. For the quoted material see page 59. Also see Mark Spence, "Crown of the Continent, Backbone of the World: The American Wilderness Ideal and Blackfeet Exclusion from Glacier National Park" Environmental History 1 (July 1996): 29-49.
10. The quote is from Mark Dowie, Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1995), xii.
11. Ibid., x.
12. Ibid., 207.

13. Ibid.

14. Robert Gottlieb, Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement (Washington D.C. and Covelo, California: Island Press, 1993), 6.

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