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Editorial: Communication, race, and outdoor spaces

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Communication, race, and outdoor spaces

The Co-Editors: Historical and institutional racism and the dominance of whiteness in land management agencies has arguably led to asymmetric uses of public lands by privileged users, to the exploitation of lands indigenous communities hold sacred, and to the perception that only certain kinds of bodies belong in outdoor spaces. Racism and coloniality have enabled and provided logics for environmental abuses and dynamics that produce and regulate poaching and violence against environmental and social justice activists. Black Lives Matter protests occurring in public squares around the world, propelled by and leading to the over-policing of and violence against Black and other protesting bodies in public spaces and places illustrate the urgency for reimagining public, outdoor spaces as racially experienced and discoursed. Furthermore, contemporary public discourse of these and other tragic events such as the mass shootings in Buffalo, NY, and El Paso, TX, in the United States, and in Christchurch, New Zealand by White supremacists and eco-fascists, compel engaged scholars to increase and sustain the study of the dynamics and stakes of race, ethnicity, racialization, and outdoor space in communication studies.

These concerns oriented and compelled our approach to this Research Topic.

This Research Topic aims to foreground the complex ways communication about outdoor spaces and/or the “Great Outdoors” shapes and is shaped by race and identity, coloniality, and the movement (or immobilization) of racialized bodies and borders/bordering. Environmental Communication scholars have written extensively about the environmental justice movement and have begun paying more attention to the nexus of race and place/space/the environment, but it is crucial that more work is done to understand that race and ethnicity are inextricable from understandings of ecology, outdoor experiences, and public, shared, or “protected” spaces (Nishime and Hester Williams, 2018).

We recognize that even though race/identity and coloniality are sometimes interlinked, they are not one and the same: concerns about race/identity can and do differ from concerns about coloniality. At the same time, we recognize that one of colonialism's most devastating successes was, as [Wynter \(2003\)](#) argued, its successful "overrepresentation" of a single ethnoclass as "the descriptive statement" of the human species. On this view, discourses about race are fundamentally an ingredient to coloniality. In other words, the first site of colonization was not land, material, or people but the very idea of the human, of who can(not) be "fully" human.

As we reflect on the essays collected in this Research Topic, two interconnected spaces come to the fore and figure prominently in racial formation and exclusion. The first are the physical spaces, those outdoor places which are symbolically and materially constructed to invite some and exclude others. The second are the academic spaces, places which privilege certain types of research, voices, and relations, while discouraging others. Both J. Drew Lanham in *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature* and Robin Kimmerer in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* write extensively about their experiences as people of color in nature and in academia ([Kimmerer, 2013](#); [Lanham, 2016](#)). For both, the constraints of scientific research and academic publishing demarcated spaces where parts of their experiences, voices, and identities were regulated and excluded. Both describe choosing to wait until they were successfully tenured before attempting to push back on those barriers.

With these stories in mind, our project sought to open space for a wider variety of academic engagement. Our editorial team was mindfully formed as racially, ethnically and regionally diverse in composition, inclusive of secured and recognized scholars in the field, as well as new and independent scholars. Members of the team represent a wide range of methodological experiences and expertise. As such, the call for papers encouraged multiple article types, including original research, hypothesis and theory, review, perspective, opinion, conceptual analysis, community case study, and policy & practice review. Contributors were invited to address a broad array of texts, sites of inquiry, and perspectives related to communication, race, and outdoor spaces. As far as the medium would allow, the editors made room for different forms of methods, questions, engagements, and forms of academic writing. While we were successful in bringing into this edition scholars, works, voices and perspectives missing from academic journals, there is still much work to be done in this area.

In what follows, we offer a conversation among the Research Topic co-editors (i.e., the editorial team) reflecting on our positionalities and interest(s) on these issues, how the featured essays extend understandings of communication, race and the outdoors, and noting some continuing challenges for scholars working at the intersection of race, the environment, and

communication studies. We initially held this conversation over Zoom, and have edited it for clarity and deepening here.

Carlos A: I'm Carlos Alemán, and I'm an associate professor at James Madison University in Virginia. I was old-schooled as a communication generalist, first at Fresno State, and then the University of Iowa, specializing in interpersonal relations and trained in social scientific and rhetorical traditions. I guess I just kept moving east. Over the years I've tended to ask questions of communication, relationships, and identity from a variety of perspectives, mused by the welcoming and contesting experiences of places that I call home. I define home in terms of family, the extended familia of our community, and the sacred environments of our residence.

I'm invested in ideas of race, relationally defined, complexly experienced, and critically theorized. I'm happy to think that the invitation to contribute to this project was born in part out of my friendship with Pete, a relationship cultivated through long conversations of race, identity and environment as we canoed the Shenandoah River and took day hikes in the Allegheny Mountains. I find myself bringing that fellowship to this editorial team, sometimes deferring to you all as experts on subject matters of environment, but also imposing into those conversations the wisdom of my racialized body as I've sought to make home in academic and outdoor spaces alike.

Jen P: My name is Jen Peebles and I'm a professor at Utah State University. From the start of my career over 20 years ago, environmental justice has played an important role in my scholarship and teaching. As a White woman instructing a predominantly White student body, I have felt compelled to call out the industrial and governmental villains and make present the communities of color who are victims of environmental racism. Much of this information was new to my students and drawing their attention to these inequities, while raising awareness and ire over the high levels of toxins dumped in Utah, has always felt like important work.

Even though Utah State University is located between Yellowstone and the Grand Teton National Park to the north and Utah's five national parks to the south, and access to "nature" being a selling point for attending USU, discussions of national parks and public spaces in my class were historically and geographically distant, often focusing on Yosemite in the mid-1800s. I did not consciously avoid critiquing my own engagement with nature, or examining who was included and excluded in my own sacred spaces, but somehow those discussions never made it onto the syllabus or into my research. My acutely attuned outrage over the injustices of race and toxins fell silent when it came to race, ethnicity and public spaces. Being part of this edition of *Frontiers* is one means of attempting to rectify this academic and personal omission.

Mariko: My name is Mariko Thomas, and I'm an independent scholar and a part-time professor in Northern New Mexico. I was connected to this excellent group by a dear friend and mentor, Tema Milstein, and this was really

exciting because I had actually started my academic journey with a heavy focus on critical race studies but detoured a bit in recent years, and was aching to get back to it. During my Masters degree I was mostly interested in multiracial family storytelling, narrative inheritance, and the ways that we tell and construct stories of our racial identities. As a mixed-race person who is mostly read as White, I was trying to understand the complicated tangle of how narratives, as well as genetic heritage interplay to help young people figure out how to identify themselves racially. I then applied for my doctorate wanting to explore race and environment to extend on this topic through the lens of environmental justice, but went left-field and started studying plant-human relationships instead. But I kept thinking about race and environment because that topic was always my starting point of learning to recognize and think about inequity, inequality, marginalization, and who had the privilege of being heard in environmental issues, a logic (or mislogic) that had led me to concern about plants.

This issue is personal, because I come from a mixed-race family, mostly Black and Japanese, and our engaged relationship with the more than human world has given us all a lot of opportunities we might not have had otherwise, and created powerful counter-narratives that have fed both me and our greater communities. The storytelling of race and environment and who gets to tell those stories and make those environmental decisions has always been exceptionally personal for me, and having a platform to support dialogue and publications about this is a hugely fulfilling experience.

Steve: I'm Steve Schwarze, I'm a Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Montana, in Missoula, Montana. So, when I was in grad school with Carlos, Michael McGee referred to one of our colleagues as "the whitest White man in Communication Studies." Now, that wasn't me, but I'm pretty close.

Race has really never been a significant or explicit part of my own scholarly work. And so this building out of the discussions in the discipline and our efforts to embrace this more fully in environmental communication have been good for me, have been challenging for me, and it started to open up a lot more ways of thinking than I have previously been accustomed to.

When we first started getting into this a little bit—when Jen, Jen, and Pete and I started talking about this—we did some work where we were interested in what's going on when people travel to national parks. What are the places through which people go on their way to what we would traditionally consider "Nature" with a capital "N"?

And we all took a place nearby us, and the one that I took was Glacier National Park. I'm still grappling with it because that park is very interesting. Donald Carbaugh (Carbaugh, 1999; Carbaugh and Rudnick, 2006) in our field has written extensively about Glacier and the people and places near it. And on one side, the east side, you have the Blackfeet reservation, which has a very different kind of relationship to the park than does Flathead

county on the west side. Flathead county has long been seen as sort of one of the last redoubts for White supremacists in the Pacific Northwest and inland Northwest. And so thinking about that, the differences and the contrast between those two sides of the park is something that has helped me expand how I think about the park, how I think about nature and wilderness, and what that means, and how people and place intersect. So, those are some of the things that have influenced how I come to this.

Kundai: My name is Kundai Chirindo. I am an associate professor at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon. I think of myself as an "accidental" environmental communication scholar because I'm an Africanist. I'm interested in the performance, contestation, and redefinition of Africanness in U.S. American popular culture. One of the nodes I've followed in recent years is this woman, Wangari Maathai, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. *What? An environmentalist won a peace prize?* Yes, she won the peace prize! How did that happen? So, I come to environmental communication scholarship largely through my interest in that very question.

In the Africana world, the concepts that we are interested in here—the outdoors, communication, and race—are not discrete concepts. From my perspective, once the environment is an isolated focus, I am prompted to ask: Whose environment? Whose outdoors? You can't answer those questions without going into questions of coloniality. Smith, an author included in this Research Topic, foregrounds the important role that controversies about ownership play in defining, claiming, and justifying the expropriation and exploitation of outdoor spaces in his analysis of the 2016 occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Natural Refuge in Southeastern Oregon by a group of ranchers. Noting that far from a being stable actant, the various meanings projected onto the land define it as a lively dynamic resource, one that "oscillates between economic resource, the foundation of personal rights, a symbol and site of governmental oppression, a mode of power, and the basis of a theory of constitutional interpretation" for the settler-ranchers, on one hand. On the other hand, that same land signifies an inheritance and legacy of "resilience to colonialism and a perseverance to survive" for the Burns Paiute Tribe. Thus, we can see that questions of ownership can be fundamental to public perceptions of outdoor spaces like parks and other designated "wildlife" areas.

Consider the idea of the national park, which we find not only here in the United States, but around the world and especially in sub-Saharan Africa. To whom do national parks belong? Who goes there? Who can't go there? Who is the "we" implied in "we go in there (i.e., to national parks)"? These are all questions that complicate my relationship to the outdoors, to the environment, and to thinking about it.

The good news for me is that these are all communication problems. These are all rhetorical problems. And so thinking about race, and the environment, and the outdoors works for me topically. But my thinking begins with a disavowal of the universality of "the environment" and of communication.

Because in the places where and among the people whom I do most of my work those are just not discreet concepts.

Jen S: I'm Jen Schneider. I'm a professor in Public Policy and Administration at Boise State, so I think I might be the only person who's not a communication scholar on the team. My degrees are in Cultural Studies, though, which obviously has some overlaps with approaches in communication.

I was thinking about this question, about what brought me to this project. I think I've always been interested in political power, and in particular how political power intersects with Whiteness. For example, my dissertation was about post-war American culture and politics, and the main backdrop of that work was the McCarthy hearings that took place before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. It was an enormously repressive time, and understanding those political machinations set the stage for examining a lot of film and literature of that era. But I didn't want to just look at the typical stuff that parroted the dominant ideologies of the day; I wanted to see what was happening in the art resisting dominant ideologies as well. The project was also motivated by the fact that a lot of people, especially White people, want to believe the 50s were some sort of golden era before all the "troubles" of the 60s and 70s started. But the social movements of the 60s had their roots in the 50s. We see that in the art. 1950s culture was really alive and contradictory and experimental, although White nostalgia seems to have erased a lot of our collective memories of and storytelling about that time. Really understanding Whiteness—including my own whiteness—and how it works was essential to completing that project.

Then my first tenure-track job ended up being at the Colorado School of Mines, which is an engineering school, and a school very focused on training future extractors of fossil fuels and minerals. For a variety of reasons, I got hired to teach environmental courses focusing on politics, policy and ethics. And I don't think I realized it at the time, but my interest in thinking about repressive political apparatuses and Whiteness transferred to thinking about climate change and opposition to climate policy, and then to the coal industry and the ways in which White male identity and grievance in particular gets wrapped up and imbricated with the politics of fossil fuels. And that's when I intersected with three of the people on this team—to write about that.

I'm no longer at the Colorado School of Mines, and we don't write a lot about coal anymore, but I find that I'm still really interested in power and Whiteness and the environment. And so, I think, especially, following the murder of George Floyd, which was now two summers ago, and frankly just calls for White allies and White folks to do something, it felt important to expand the conversations around race and identity in the environmental communication space. It was already happening in pockets, of course. We're not inventing anything here. But I wanted to see if we could work on a project collaboratively

that might further and intervene in that intersection of race, communication, and the environment.

Carlos T: I'm Carlos Tarin. I'm an assistant professor at the University of Texas at El Paso. I've been interested in environmental communication since I was an undergraduate. I was interested in working on this Research Topic because it was a way of sort of connecting very disparate parts of my research and my personal identity that I feel, in a lot of ways, I've sort of trained out of myself. When I was in graduate school, I felt like issues of identity, difference, race, and ethnicity were always just the "special topic" at the end of the semester. It was always just a single essay or a single day of class devoted to a topic like environmental justice. And so, even though I had interest in Latina/o/x Communication Studies, I never got training formally in that area at the graduate level. I've had to fill in those knowledge gaps on my own. I feel very well-versed in environmental communication, organizational comm, and in rhetoric, but I was never really taught how race informs those approaches or how it can be instructive or constitutive of those approaches.

When I started in my faculty position at the University of Texas at El Paso, I think that gave me an opportunity to connect these divergent areas because I was now in a position where I did not really have to keep these parts of my personal and scholarly identity separate. There's no need to erase being a person that's interested in the environment, who also happens to be a queer, Latino, first generation college graduate. My interest and the work that I've really been doing the last couple of years has been to connect environmental communication, Latina/o/x communication, and broader discussions about nationality and coloniality.

These experiences brought me to this project with the belief that other people might be feeling those same absences. I know there are graduate students who are receiving instruction on environmental communication and are wondering about the erasure or omission of race in the literature—perhaps wondering if they fit in this field. My hope is that these essays will help to connect these topics in a way that begins to bridge those gaps.

Pete: I am Pete Bsumek, and I am a professor of rhetoric and communication studies at James Madison University. I come to this Research Topic not only as someone who has spent his entire academic career working in the field of environmental communication, but also as an environmental advocate and activist. I have been involved with public lands conservation and the wilderness preservation movement for nearly 30 years. So, my interest in participating in this Research Topic is motivated by my advocacy work as much as my academic commitments.

I also think I come at this much like Jen Peebles, as someone who has been more than capable of talking about environmental justice in the classroom and advocacy strategy sessions, but not fully tuned-in to the whiteness that grounds environmentalism and environmental communication. This began to change for

me about 7 or 8 years ago when my son-in-law, who is African American, began to visit. During those early visits I finally began to understand what people are talking about when they talk about embodiment.

When he and my step-daughter would visit we would take them hiking and picnicking and sight-seeing in the nearby national park or the national forest because we live in a small town and that's pretty much the most interesting thing to do where we live. It was on those family adventures that I began to see things differently and feel things differently. I remember about 25 years ago, I went hiking with a friend outside of St. Louis and as we were driving, I saw more Confederate flags than I had ever seen. Intellectually I was thinking, "Oh! This is why, mostly White people hike." So, I had been intellectually aware of my whiteness and White privilege for a long time, but I hadn't really made sense of it—understood its implications—until I felt like it might not be there anymore.

Carlos A: It's been over 20 years since I started taking my son along on hiking and canoeing trips to cultivate a love of nature and wilderness. And about 15 years since the three of us started camping in the back areas of Virginia, Pete. There were times when we trekked those areas that I communicated a vibe that said, "Tread carefully and keep your eyes open, son." Half the time, I suspect he knew I was saying, "there are some things out here that are more dangerous than snakes and bears, mijo."

What I liked about having you with us, Pete, is that you weren't constantly putting out that signal. I wanted my son to hear that silence. I wanted him to experience canoeing the Shenandoah or hiking a trail without feeling he has to have a background story that speaks to his rights or reasons for being there. That he has the same rights to access as any other person.

I feel that's the same with the journal space here. I'd like more people to feel like it's their space too, even if they've never published in an area of environmental science or environmental communication. So, I know I articulated my positioning on this editorial board rather simply at the outset, but it's motivated from this deep place of inclusion and relationships that we're all coming from.

Mariko: Carlos, your memories brought up a lot for me, because my entry to this always feels complicated as I think this is one of those topics that does move from the so innately personal, lived experiences to these macro theoretical fields that we study, and I'm hoping that these articles help us walk the boundary line between those. My understanding of race and environment came from my uncles, my aunts and my father. We'd all be backpacking and to be clear, I am the whitest person in my entire family, but there I am, backpacking up in the mountains with my dad's generation, and they're like, "Oh this so great!" And, "Race doesn't really exist up here. Not like LA, we're never going to get pulled over out here."

I think I grew up with their stories in my ears thinking, "Oh, cool! Totally. Race doesn't exist up in the mountains." After my entry to academic perspectives on race, I had a reckoning with

the short-lived experience of how my family felt up there, but realizing my academic understanding of wilderness spaces as cultural, politicized, and utterly steeped in inequity contradicted their lived experience of wilderness spaces, and I'm not totally sure if it was fair to discount how they experienced it just because I had a bunch of books that say there are no apolitical spaces. I think one of the ways we can toe this line is with accounts of practical lived experiences that perhaps have been placed in academic framings. For example, I had the privilege of writing an article titled "From urban places to outdoor spaces" for this issue with my uncle, who has been running BIPOC-focused non-profits for decades. [Thomas and Thomas](#) puts forth five guidelines for working with BIPOC youth in an outdoor recreation setting, and these are based on experiences from the field with kids, analyzed and contextualized within the backdrop of he and our familial relationship and then also extant research in the area. Like [Kimmerer and Lanham's](#) work, we were hoping to cover the tension between the interpersonal and experiential part of environmental communication alongside historical context and theoretical renderings of the subject.

So, I guess I'm at a point of wanting to complicate this tension and asking, how can we empathize with these moments of joy that BIPOC folks have maybe experienced in connection with the more-than-human world? But also being able to own that story with these other narratives of things that were going on structurally that we know are not good or beneficial for BIPOC individuals and communities? I'm hoping that that's what this overall issue can kind of start to address a little bit.

Jen S: I was thinking, when Mariko was talking... Carlos Aleman, I don't know if you remember this, but I went to Yosemite a few years ago because a few of us on this call were thinking about not just how race functions within national parks or is constructed by parks, but also about arterials into parks, and the endangering of certain bodies, like Pete's son-in-law for example. You know, as you're driving through in order to get into Shenandoah, you're seeing all of these Confederate flags and as you're driving to get into Yosemite you're, you know, driving through Northern California and seeing a lot of threatening signs there. And I remembered you talked a little bit about traveling with your family and what kinds of negotiations you had to make and think about. And that started being the, the access point to transcendence. Right?

Carlos A: Funny you remember that. It can sometimes feel as if all the routes into Yosemite's gates pass along one enclave or another. Some people will go all the way around through Fresno just to avoid that scene while others have no clue. But I'll tell you this much, I'm pretty sure everyone in my family has a story about some form of racial discrimination at the park or en route that ended up punctuating their experience.

Steve: Talking about those kinds of experiences, one of the questions we talked about was how [Lanham](#) [in *The Home Place*] concludes the "Birding while Black" chapter, and it seems to me

that he's not one to shy away from talking about transcendence. Right? I mean, this whole notion of joy is really bound up with these sorts of transcendent moments. About the beauty in birds and the natural world that we can share and appreciate together.

And, you know, as I was reading about that and thinking about that, transcendence is—to me, or to a lot of folks who would consider themselves critical scholars—transcendence is really a form of mystification. It's a move that can erase relevant differences. And I'm very interested in how the rest of you think about that move that Lanham makes in relation to thinking about and trying to incorporate and infuse thinking about race and environmental communication. I mean, I find it provocative at this particular moment because the idea is very much bound up with the larger challenges of multicultural democracy. And it seems like we are so lacking in possibilities in our culture for identification and fellow-feeling and connection that are not fueled by division, or by othering or by demonization to strengthen identification among others.

So those are some of the thoughts that are kind of percolating with me a little bit, about what are those possibilities for transcendence and what's the plus/minus in terms of being able to articulate racial identities.

Jen S: Maybe this is connected to what you just asked Steve, but I'm grappling with the ways in which Lanham's book is very much for me about memory, and it's very evocative of place. It's hard to even talk about it without reinscribing some of these boundaries, but at times it feels as if place, and the relationship to the environment, to the wild things in it, is foregrounded in Lanham's book. At other times race is foregrounded. Now that is not a very intersectional approach to thinking about it right there, always both are present in this book. But it made me wonder if there's a way in which there's a celebration of joy, of memory, of experience, that Lanham allows himself, that feels kind of liberatory. And I wanted to interrogate my own expectation that he also be critical about race, class, intersectionality, whatever it is, at every moment. To not be over-determining what I'm expecting from this memoir. So, I don't know if that connects to the comments you're making about transcendence, but it feels right now as if books like this, like *The Home Place*, can never just be what they are. They also have like all of these ghosts of expectation and theorization attached to them. So, I was just trying to think through that as a White reader this morning when I was preparing for this conversation.

Carlos A: I hear that. Eddah Mutua made a point during a panel discussion at the 2022 Central States Communication Association that international faculty are often directed to publish on mainstream topics in order to secure tenure. It's an act of contortion.

You once pointed out, Pete, that Lanham's writing and viral videos seem to successfully bring the topic of race in outdoor spaces to White audiences. But I could feel when that was happening in his book; the places where Lanham is so obvious

in writing to the whiteness of audiences that it must have been painful for him to twist that way.

Similarly, I feel when Kimmerer writes of having to switch their writing voice for the audience, it's what I assume is the imagined audience by most White critics; not simply an academic audience, but a White academic audience. So, yeah, books like this are haunted by ghosts of expectation.

Kundai: There's something evocative about how Steve talks about Lanham's declaration that we all have an appetite for joy and for being out there and birding is for everyone as transcendence. And Steve explains transcendence as denial. Erasure.

I think that I turned that question of transcendence, Steve, into a question as opposed to a declaration. The idea that we all have the environment. The idea that we all communicate; that communication is a human universal. Right? We declare... I mean, that's an axiom of our entire field. For me, it's a question.

And here's what I mean when I say it becomes a question: How can we turn environments, how can we turn climate, how can we turn the outdoors, how can we turn communication into universals? And how can we recognize the ways that the 8 billion relate to outdoor spaces?

And the answer I'm learning, and I haven't quite figured it out, is that transcendence does not mean sameness. I mean, for Burke and McGee and that whole school, transcendence is synthesis; transcendence is oneness. The philosopher Mbembe (2017) concludes *Critique of Black Reason* by noting that we only have one world and it's a world that is multiple and diverse, bursting with variety. That's the kind of transcendence I support, if it's true that we only have one world, if it's true that communication is a human universal. And that's sort of what I'm trying to think through in my own work: What does it mean to say that communication is universal, but it's also different among different people groups? In a similar way in this Research Topic, Senda-Cook's "Physicality in Postcolonialism: Tension at the Asian Rural Institute" foregrounds some of the ways in which negotiations of gender, race, and national identity coalesce to define and demarcate the outdoors.

Pete: I really liked that, Kundai. One of the things that has frustrated me about a lot of work in environmental communication, and environmental studies in general, is this idea that if we can just change our understanding of nature from a resource to some other (ecocentric) thing, like from an anthropocentric to a non-anthropocentric worldview, that this will somehow solve our problems.

I remember way back when I first started getting into this stuff, when there were no environmental rhetoric courses in my graduate program, I came across a book by Leiss (1972) called *The Domination of Nature*. One of the things that he pointed out way back then is that the ideology of the domination of nature is also an ideology of the domination of some people by other people. He argued that there are three main components to the

ideology: abstract and universal conceptions of nature; abstract and universal conceptions of society, and abstract and universal conceptions of the human subject. And once those universals are in place, it doesn't matter what they are—you have a tool for the domination of some people by others. This means that we are stuck with that question that Kundai started with: “For who?” Haymes (2018) makes a similar argument about Aldo Leopold's “land ethics” and “biotic community,” showing how, like most western systems of environmental ethics, they are grounded in forms of universalized Whiteness.

And what I like about what you were just talking about when you suggest that transcendence doesn't have to be mystification is that you are raising the possibility that there are alternative forms of connection, or consubstantiality as Burke would say. For me this raises the question: What does that transcendence look like? How do you put the universal and the different together without reproducing domination?

These are exactly the kinds of questions that Taylor Johnson and Joshua Smith are addressing in their articles. Smith's analysis of the 2016 takeover and occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge shows how right-wing extremist rhetoric is doubling down on ideologies of the domination of nature associated with settler colonial logics of privatization, racialization, and the erasure of Native peoples. While Johnson calls our attention to the ways that the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition navigated, negotiated, and offered alternatives to American publicity and counterpublicity in their advocacy for Bears Ears National Monument. What I think is especially important about the Inter-Tribal Coalition's advocacy and Johnson's rhetorical analysis of the controversy that ensued over the monument is that they point to the possibility of the kind of transcendence that Kundai is suggesting—recognition of our common humanity and acknowledgment and respect for our differences.

Pete: Well, you don't have to answer this Mariko, but you know when Steve was talking about transcendence, I thought of your personal stories. This idea that “up in the mountains race doesn't exist, but intellectually you know that it does.” Even so, there was, it sounded like, the kind of thing Steve was describing, this transcendent sort of thing was happening. And maybe I'm off base on that, but could you talk a little bit more about that.

Mariko: Yeah, thanks Pete for this question, I was thinking as you guys were talking about how intersectional identities work in terms of environmental communication, and really trying to consider a web of intersecting identities where the environment is an influential part of each cog. For me, it kind of helps me think about how environment is everywhere already-always, all the time and indelibly wound into our cultural identities.

Our relationships of how we have learned or choose to engage with “the environment” can be a cultural identity and just like anything else, can be affected by greater structures while still having a really personal, intimate, and experienced component.

That's something that's been helping me kind of work through the micro to macro, interpersonal to intercultural, self to society conflict of environmental identity. I think one has their own associations, an idea of perhaps what one's race or gender is, what it means to them through the sensationally personal experience of being in one's own body, what it means to their family, and in context of the traditions they were raised on— and then there's also the dominant societal narrative that is about the identity. This is one of the key takeaways from Sowards and Banerjee's “*Ecotourism as Leisure in the Experience of the 'Great Outdoors'.*” Sowards and Banerjee demonstrate how ecotourism is a form of racialization and coloniality, and a form of transcendence. I don't think it has to be one or the other, you know, I think ignoring the possibility of experiential transcendence isn't great because transcendence is joy, it's magic. It's an alleviation. But we have to consider it alongside the physical and material realities of being a body in a certain space or place in a certain cultural context and the privileges and oppressions that exist there.

Carlos T: Absolutely! I think it's important to remember that we can't disconnect our lived experiences—especially the material and physical realities—when we think about our relationships with the environment, or even how we go about doing environmental communication research. Not all people are able to experience nature in the same ways and we need to be attentive to that. One of the things that Spielhagen et al. argue in their essay in this Research Topic is that we need more intersectional analyses for how we study the environment, but also for how we think about practitioners and people doing work in the outdoors. As they explained, there are so few people of color working in outdoor recreation as it is—so when we place additional burdens on them to, for example, take the lead on diversity and inclusion work, it can be really exhausting. For practitioners, scholars, or just people in nature, I think we need to do a better job of thinking about the constitutive role race can play in how we engage with the natural world.

Kundai: In a way I feel like we're talking to that question, to what philosopher Tuana (2019) has called the forgetting of race in the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is a human problem. It is a problem of species proportion as Chakrabarty (2009) has pointed out. Right? But the thing about species is that species are diverse, and the human species is not distinct in that regard. How do we retain the variety of human species even as we address ourselves and orient ourselves to what communication scholars have long called the crisis? And that's a communication problem to me. The Anthropocene names a species problem. How do we recover the other end of species thinking, which is speciation?

That's what we've got to contend with even as we think about the Anthropocene. I'm one of the people who's written in our field about precarity, and the generalization of precarity to all of us. And the more I think about it, the less persuaded I am that

I want to keep talking about precarity and the generalization of precarity to people who haven't been precarious before, because that does not seem very promising to me.

Pete: If that's not where it's at, and maybe you don't know where it's at yet, but where's your compass pointing?

Kundai: I think about three things a lot. They are commitments of mine and my research, teaching, and writing. I haven't been able to express these in my writing yet but here they are: First, historicize. You know, we started off talking about transcendence. Even in that moment, every moment of transcendence has its own locality. Has its own specificity, its own conditions of possibility. We should name the enabling conditions for truths we hold. This is why I ask whose environment, whose national park, where did these ideas come from? And some of the pieces that are in this special issue get to those big questions. One of the lessons I take from [Graham's "Resisting 'the World of the Powerful': 'Wild' Steam and the Creation of Yellowstone National Park"](#) is about the importance of historicizing our ideas of what we think has always been.

The second thing is, pathologize. I think about finding the limits of each moment of relief.

I try to commit myself to finding what's absurd about the ideas I fall in love with.

First historicize and then pathologize. Find what is bizarre about everything. The goal of these first two moves is to humanize, to write more of the 8 billion humans with whom we share this planet into the things that we value most: the environment, outdoor space, and communication. It was weird for me, I mean I've spent half my life in sub-Saharan Africa, to be told that rhetoric is the lifeblood of democracy, and that where there is no democracy, there's no rhetoric. This is untenable to me, people. This is ludicrous. And the problem wasn't that my people don't communicate or aren't rhetorical. No, the problem is *here*. It's the idea of rhetoric that we're sustaining. You know, it's taken me a long time to even say that out loud. But that's it; we've got to humanize.

If we see a concept, something we love, that's lacking in humanity, let's humanize it. Let's figure out why there aren't more women and more differently-abled people in there. Let's figure it out.

So, that's where my compass is pointing right now and I don't have all the methods. These are more sort of principles that I'm trying to orient my thinking around. But that's where I'm at Pete.

Pete: Thank you.

Mariko: I love what you say about how we need to humanize and have more diversity of perspectives in these times of precarity. I think working out some of our human issues right now, like our handling of race, is a great steppingstone to understanding oppressions and lack of voice in general, which will hopefully, extend to us starting to understand more parts of the world that aren't human, which are entirely part of climate disruption.

Kundai: Yup!

Mariko: And I'm hoping that, yes, we have to practice on logics with people who speak, you know, in verbal languages because that's all we have the capacity to understand right now. But hopefully building the structures of understanding and acceptance of diverse voices would expand beyond our species at some point.

Kundai: Absolutely.

Jen P: I love that Kundai keeps saying "whose environment, whose environment?" And I would add, we also have to be much more complex in thinking about what we mean by the environment and what we mean by nature. When we start to police what is and isn't "the environment" and what is and isn't "nature," it leads directly to policing what people and activities that are allowed in those spaces.

At the beginning of the project, even just figuring out what we meant by the "great outdoors," and "great" and "outdoors" took hours of discussions. Where are the demarcations between "the outdoors" and other spaces? What do those distinctions mean? Why are they there and are they of use? And in what ways are they exclusionary? These are the questions that I think are important too. If we are going to continue to use these terms, it's important to actively and consciously note their symbolic limits and their physical barriers.

Carlos T: I think this is something my colleagues, Sarah and Leandra, and I were really struggling with in our essay in this Research Topic that focused on outdoor sport and recreation companies responding to the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 ([Tarin et al.](#)). One of the things we kept coming back to when analyzing the social media solidarity statements is that most of them were vague, which I think is because they were trying to be palatable to White audiences. When you have protests about White supremacy and police brutality, you would imagine that a statement would call those ideas out explicitly—but we didn't find much evidence for that. I think that's because the way we—as academics, as a public—have typically talked about the environment, we talk about it in frames of Whiteness. So, if the big outdoor companies are appealing to White audiences even at a moment when they should be building bridges to communities of color, what does that do for creating a sense of belongingness?

Carlos A: I love how that exchange just worked out a parallel between the environment and the journal. These two landscapes. The assumed "we" that Jen Peeples' recognizes tells us that our conversation is about who gets to play in both spaces.

Jen S: And [Carlos] Alemán, do you remember? When we were working on the call for manuscripts, the four White co-authors had brought a draft to the larger group. And I think your comment, your feedback literally, Carlos Alemán, was like, "This reads like White people wrote it," or "This reads like you're writing it for White people." And I had no idea what you were talking about. And I feel the same, when you said Drew Lanham is writing some of these chapters

for White people, and I was like, “I didn’t even think about that.”

I feel like that is the sort of, just to go back to these comments about universalizing, the universalization of Whiteness or the presumption of that being the sort of norm or whatever. The ways in which I’ve internalized that; the way I see the world that way. It sort of operates at this microcosm level of even *this* small project, of putting this Research Topic together. Ways in which, even though we’re trying not to recreate some of that unevenness, the conditions of supremacy, there is like this extra work that you as people of color, as co-authors have to do to point out, like, “You’ve missed this. You’re not seeing this. This is absent.”

And part of that is just collaboration, but it’s just interesting to see that recreated here, even in our group.

Carlos T: I think that sort of self-reflexivity is something that more scholars really need though, especially if they are writing about issues of race and representation. We all have limits to our knowledge and are sometimes oblivious to the kind of erasures or absences that are happening in our work. I think that’s why building coalitions in our work, in our communities, in our advocacy, etc. is really important. One of the things I loved about *de Onís’* essay in this Research Topic is that she’s attentive to the ways that coalition building is vital when you’re doing the nitty gritty work of environmental organizing and advocacy. She shows how we can connect our work to different audiences—even children!—but we have to be willing to forge those connections. That’s something I wish a lot more environmental communication scholarship, or really just communication scholarship, did more frequently.

Pete: When Kundai introduced the problem of forgetting race in the Anthropocene, I thought of Donna Haraway and *Staying With the Trouble*. For a long time, we’ve thought of the environment as problems that can be solved (Haraway, 2016). And we’ve reached a point—especially now but if we look back, we can see that it was sort of always this way with toxic things and nuclear waste, and now climate change—where there’s just no “solving” the problem. There’s only sort of working with the problem, managing things, and so on. Other scholars too have grappled with the central concepts of uncertainty, unfolding, and generally tangling with the lack of clear solutions to complex and wicked problems. For example, adrienne maree brown’s *Emergent Strategy* also speaks to this: suggesting ever-emerging fluid solutions for complex social problems (Brown, 2017).

And it seems to me that in a lot of ways these questions of race and intersectionality are really a similar kind of situation. Like Kundai said we have to historicize and we have to pathologize and interrogate the ideas we fall in love with and we have to humanize. We also have to pay attention to who is absent: whose story is missing, who is not in the journal, and who is not part of the coalition. And, it seems to me, we have to continually do that.

Anyway, that’s what I was thinking. And it made me think of the essay by *Tarin et al.* and the statements that come out after the murder of George Floyd and the Christian Cooper incident. And here are all these outdoor recreation companies making statements and at least to some degree recognizing that they are entangled with the problem.

But in a way if you don’t stay with that... Right? It’s not a problem that can simply be solved with a statement. And these are all the things our universities and our discipline are dealing with right now. There’s not one policy or practice that fixes this and there’s not one statement that makes it “all good.” And we just have no choice but to stay with the trouble. And I guess, like the man said, you know, make good trouble out of it and about it.

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