Investigating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Adirondack Region of New York State

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Abstract

This qualitative research study investigated diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Adirondack region of New York State. The Adirondack Park is 6.2 million acres, and is the largest park in the lower 48. While the park is free and open to the public, not everyone who wants to access the park has the ability to do so. Race and socioeconomic status are two factors that have a major influence on an individual's access to green spaces, such as the Adirondack Park. Access to green spaces has proven to be important for the public health and wellbeing of communities. The lack of diversity in the Adirondack Park is reflective of both the region and the United States' outdoor industry. With all of this in mind, this research aims to gain a well-rounded understanding of how the sense of inclusivity in a major park, the Adirondack Park, is tied to an economic or racial divide among people who travel there and those who do not. Through the use of surveying and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from a variety of organizations that do work in the Adirondack region, our team set out to gain an understanding of why there is a lack of diversity in the park, as well as the existing programs and initiatives that are doing work to address this. In our research, we found that many programs and organizations are working to increase diversity and inclusivity in the park, through education initiatives, more inclusive staff hiring and training, and efforts to make the park a more welcoming space for Indigenous communities in the region. In our conversations with stakeholders and survey respondents, we also found that there are many ways in which the Park could become more welcoming to BIPOC visitors, such as providing affordable temporary housing, finding ways to reduce traffic and create parking close to trailheads, as well as creating programs that focus on the native history of the area.

Introduction

The inclusivity, or lack thereof, in the Adirondack Mountain region of New York State traces back to the 18th century, when there were enslaved people inhabiting the region, thus causing a harsh reality for the racial divide at that time (Golebiewski, 2019, p. 114). Even centuries later, people of color are still feeling the historical effects of racism and inequality, even in an area where the State of NY and Adirondack Park Agency are expected to promote inclusivity for all public land users. Because of this rooted racism, "the popular image of the Adirondacks has been that of a predominately modern, white-settled area that serves as a base for seasonal tourism" (Golebiewski, 2019, p. 114). In a location like the 6.2 million-acre Adirondack Park that is free, open for visitation and widely known across the country, it is unacceptable that it is not accessible to everyone who wishes to visit. The lack of inclusivity in green spaces puts people of color and those of a lower socioeconomic status at a further disadvantage, in comparison to their white, affluent counterparts. This can exacerbate health inequalities for people who are already at a greater risk of preventable diseases (Astell-Burt et al., 2014, p. 2). Due to a racial and economic inequality in access to green spaces, as well as the evidence of

improved wellbeing that stems from this access, people of color as well as those of lower socioeconomic status are more susceptible to varying diseases and health problems (Astell-Burt et.al., 2014, p. 2). The purpose of this qualitative research was to investigate inclusivity in the Adirondack Park for people of color, as well as those of a lower income, with a specific focus on youth who have an interest in recreating within New York public lands. In gaining a better understanding of youth preferences regarding recreation within the Adirondack Park, we will be able to hone in on an area of focus for conducting our research, as well as provide potential solutions for bolstering youth visitation rates. Our research investigates innovative programs--focused on inclusivity and recreation--facilitated by civil society organizations and the state of NY, and culminates in a suite of recommendations and solutions related to creating a more welcoming space in the Adirondack Park, and how to encourage and facilitate youth participation from marginalized communities.

The Adirondack Park was established as a forest preserve by state law in 1885. The park spans over six million acres, making it the largest protected area of land east of the Mississippi River. One of the most unique aspects of the park is that half of the land is privately owned and over 130,000 people live within the park's boundaries (Wills, 2018, pg. 114). The Adirondack Park is a very popular destination for participation in outdoor activities, both for those living within the park as well as tourists, primarily from New York and Canada. While the park is free and open to the public, not everyone who wants to access the park has the ability to do so. The lack of diversity in the park is reflective of both the region and the nature of the United States' outdoor industry. Green spaces being occupied (predominantly) by white people can be seen all throughout the U.S. This trend is inherently intertwined with the systemic racism and racial inequities that exist in the country. White dominance in outdoor spaces is easily recognizable to anyone who spends time participating in outdoor activities. Making the Adirondack Park more accessible to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) is not a simple act. This requires dismantling systems of racial injustice that created the white-dominated outdoor spaces that exist today. With all of this in mind, our research aims to gain a well-rounded understanding of how the sense of inclusivity in a major park, the Adirondack Park, creates an economic or racial divide among people who travel there and those who don't. This will set the stage for a deeper look into greater trends within access to green spaces, and how all of these combined factors create an imbalance amongst demographics, as well as differences in overall wellbeing.

There are several organizations that are working towards increasing diversity within the Adirondack Park. The Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI) is an organization that became increasingly active in 2020, in response to the events surrounding the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter Movement. ADI works with many other organizations in the area including John Brown Lives, ADK Mountain Club, the Adirondack Council, Adirondack Wilderness Advocates, and the Adirondack North Country Association (Council). Their goal is to promote equity and inclusivity by offering diversity training programs and educational resources about race. In 2020, ADI received a $250,000 grant

from the NY State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), and with this funding they were able to hire Nicole Hylton-Patterson, a specialist in diversity, equity, and inclusion work. Hylton-Patterson describes the outdoors as a "Precarious space for the black body," and she writes that in order for people of color to feel comfortable in the outdoors, they need to first feel safe in these spaces (AP News, 2020).

This Action Research was conducted in collaboration with the Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI) to assist the organization in their research efforts, as well as to share ideas and recommendations on how to fix the problem of accessibility. To enrich the data that already exists regarding inclusivity within the Adirondack Park, we chose to focus specifically on issues of equity in recreational activities that occur in the area. In doing this, we found that while there are many efforts to improve diversity in outdoor recreation, not much has changed due to the root of systemic racism as well as a lack of behavioral change (Fields, 2020, p.1). We honed in on a smaller area of focus, investigating youth outreach programs in order to better understand how this lack of inclusivity and sense of not belonging can arise at a young age. One of the primary questions we posed in our research surrounds the concept and sense of safety in the Adirondack Park. If the Adirondack Park is meant to be a space that is inclusive and open to everyone, people of color should not feel unsafe or at risk for targeted asks of racism and racial biases, including young minority populations. The entrenched racism within the area has not dissipated, making the park much less inviting to people of color. This sense of unsafety may be passed down through generations, with incidents of racial profiling or racism in the Adirondack Park serving as a precautionary tale.

Incidents of racism in public lands are not isolated occurrences. In the Adirondack Park, incidents of racism have been seen just as frequently as in other areas. The Director of the Adirondack Diversity Initiative, Nichole Hylton-Patterson, has experienced this firsthand in an area that she called home. In July of 2020, Hylton-Patterson, a middle-aged Black woman, was running her usual route around Saranac Lake. On a bridge along that area, someone wrote a racist slur, seemingly directed towards her (Silvarole, 2020, p. 3). This area is a public space, supposedly an outdoor location inclusive to all that was funded by New Yorkers tax dollars. Despite this, the generalization made amongst New Yorkers is that people of color do not enjoy, and do not belong, in areas of wilderness like the Adirondack Park, as articulated by Donathan Brown, a professor at Rochester Institute of Technology (Silvarole, 2020, p. 3). This often results in people of color feeling the need to bring a white friend with them while visiting the park, like Hylton-Patterson now does, to prevent people from questioning where they are visiting the park from, or why they are there. Brown noted how "Inquiries like that can seem innocent, but they actually challenge that person's right to enjoy the Adirondack Park without their presence being questioned" (Silvarole, 2020, p. 3). Instances like this create a stark divide between those who can visit the park and be comfortable in the area, and those who cannot. With a number of that cause exclusivity, people of color are less likely to continue visiting the park and feel welcome in the public space, thus creating a lack of inclusivity and cultivating a white-dominated space.

To ensure the validity of our research, we will also be reaching out to Indigenous groups and organizations to gage their feeling of inclusivity in the Adirondack Park. It is important for us to tell the story of everyone being impacted by the exclusive and white nature of the area and think of the most applicable ways to solve the issue for everyone. During our first meeting with ADI's co-founder Pete Nelson, we learned that ADI has not yet partnered with any local Indigenous organizations. This inspired us think of ways that our research and data collection may also serve as a means to create partnerships between organizations.

A lack of knowledge about the outdoors, and prior experience in outdoor spaces, may also hinder those from exploring it and feeling included. Different definitions of wilderness may result in some feeling comfortable in parks such as the Adirondack Park, and others feeling alienated. In past centuries, "The environmental discourse presented wilderness as a pristine, endangered place, unspoiled by civilization and untouched by human hands" (Taylor, 2000, p. 172). Wilderness had the notion of being a retreat where people could go and be amongst the quiet and relaxing outdoors. However, this soon changed as people began to realize how easy it is for humans to alter the wilderness. It eventually became a resource that was perceived as existing to benefit us, and fulfill our needs or desires. It is said that three major factors account for the changing perceptions in regards to how wilderness is viewed: transcendentalism, romanticism, and frontierism. "These ideas converged to construct an image of wilderness that is potent and persistent" (Taylor, 2000, p. 173). These changing views of how wilderness can be seen introduced a new meaning to the outdoors that people once saw as inviting. Wilderness started to be seen as a place for middle- or upper-class white people to retreat. They had, and currently have, the "power" to change the outdoors to fit their notions, leaving those of a different racial or economic background without a say or influence. Today, the people within this demographic perceive the wilderness as it once was: a place where they can retreat to and escape urban problems. Most white, affluent people do not question this ideology that they have created, nor do they seem to have a problem with it. Due to these preconceived notions, as well as inherent prejudices, people who are a part of this demographic may become uncomfortable when they see people of color in wild lands, or hear about plans to diversify the area. "This discomfort may manifest itself in hostility directed toward ethnic minority wild land users" (Taylor 2000, p. 174). These differences in perceptions of the public land around us leads to a lack of inclusivity in regards to how some perceive the land, and how these definitions of wilderness seemingly exclude others who do not fit into that picture.

Literature Review

The following Literature Review will first explore the history of the Environmental Justice Movement in the U.S., and will then discuss recent literature that explores the lack of diversity in outdoor recreation, interest, accessibility, perceptions of, and impediments to minority youth engagement in outdoor recreation/visitation to public lands (broadly), and

within the Adirondack Park. The Literature Review then delves into local, national, and internationally recognized innovative recreation and inclusivity programs that have promoted and facilitated a better understanding of minority youth engagement in recreation on public lands, and calls for more research in this emerging field.

History of the Environmental Justice Movement

Environmental injustice has been a pervasive issue for quite some time, both within the United States and the world. However, the term itself was not coined until the 1980s. With its definition came the Environmental Justice Movement in the United States. Most people trace the Environmental Justice Movement back to the early 1980s, with the response to the proposal by the state of North Carolina to place a polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) landfill in a predominantly African American community in Warren County, NC, called Shocco Township (Bell, 2014, p. 66). One activist who protested the landfill, Reverend Benjamin Chavis, labelled this injustice as "Environmental Racism." The protest of, and discussion about, the PCB landfill in Shocco Township garnered national attention. The incident led to further investigation of environmental injustices occurring in the area, and "Several reports followed that provided further evidence of a significant correlation between the location of hazardous waste sites and the racial demographics of the county" (Bell, 2014, p. 66). The scope of this research expanded to a national scale, and it quickly became evident that this is a recurring issue in other areas of the country as well, such as in Houston, "... A city with a 25% black population at that time, [in which] six of the eight city-owned waste incinerators and three of the four landfills were cited in black neighborhoods" (Bell, 2014, p. 66).

The Environmental Justice Movement, from its origin, was linked to the Black Civil Rights Movement, due to the intersection between environmental issues and systemic racism. The movement started as a grassroots campaign in Warren County, but as attention and awareness of environmental justice grew, it escalated into a larger-scale movement, with political and social influence. In 1991, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit was held in Washington, D.C. (Bell, 2014, p. 66). A year later, in 1992, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established the Office of Environmental Equity, which was later renamed the Office of Environmental Justice (Bell, 2014, p. 66). Within the same year, the Environmental Injustice Act was proposed to the U.S. Congress. This act "... Would have placed a moratorium on the siting or permitting of new chemical facilities that release toxins that significantly impact on human health and wellbeing" (Bell, 2014, p. 66). While this act would have aided in making a policy-oriented change regarding environmental impact on human health, it was never passed, even after several attempts. However, in 1993, the EPA established the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC), which was created with the intention of collaborating with, and advising, the EPA (Bell, 2014, p. 66). In 1994, the Clinton administration passed an executive order, titled "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations." This order is outlined:

> "... Instructed every national state department to develop an agency-wide environmental justice strategy and to ensure that any of its activities that substantially affect human health or the environment should be conducted in a way that does not discriminate on the basis of race, color or national origin." (Bell, 2014, p. 66)

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a time of social and political momentum for the environmental justice movement. The media attention and political action taken as a result of environmental injustices such as the one in Warren County were contributors to significant momentum in the movement. This all occurred "... Out of the historical context of a diverse array of social movements, including those organized for Indigenous land rights, public health, community empowerment and black civil rights" (Bell, 2014, p. 67). However, this was just the beginning of what has become a continuous challenge and fight for combating environmental injustices and racism, on both local and national scales. There have been countless setbacks within the movement, including the period of time in which the Bush administration was active. While there was a significant amount of policy-making surrounding environmental justice prior to the Bush administration, much of this policy failed to address the systemic issues that perpetuate environmental injustice and racism. Income inequality plays a large role in this injustice, particularly in regards to race. In a 2012 study, it was found that:

> "... More than 25% of the black and Latin American population are living in poverty, compared to less than 10% of the white population; black unemployment has generally been twice the level of white unemployment for as long as the data has been tracked; and, though black people make up only about 12% of the population, they make up 40% of the prison population. " (Bell, 2014, p. 69)

One of the main issues the current environmental justice movement intends to address is the injustice that occurs in relation to the placement of sites for landfills, toxic waste, etc. in vulnerable communities. However, the movement also focuses on access, or lack thereof, to green spaces and other environmental amenities. Green spaces can be defined in many different ways, but are mainly categorized as "An area of grass, trees, or other vegetation set apart for recreational or aesthetic purposes in an otherwise urban environment" (Oxford Languages, 2020, p. 1). Green spaces vary depending on their environment, and the population inhabiting the location. No matter how they are categorized, green spaces have been proven to be crucial to a community's overall wellbeing.

Prior Research on Access to Green Spaces and Environmental Amenities

In a 2016 study, researchers set out to test an urban green space indicator for public health. The study emphasized the sentiment that "Providing healthy urban environments, which facilitate physical activity and recreation, should be promoted in public health policies" (Van Den Bosch, 2016, p. 159). In addition, the researchers recognized the findings of prior studies on this topic, which have "... Demonstrated the positive public health effects of access to green spaces. A recent study shows that moving to greener urban areas, as

measured by the percentage of green cover, improves mental health" (Van Den Bosch, 2016, p. 159). The study also mentioned prior research surrounding pregnancy, and how time spent in green spaces has been shown to alleviate some of the potential health concerns surrounding pregnancy, such as mental health and cardiovascular and respiratory issues (Van Den Bosch, 2016,160). The study emphasized the positive impacts of natural green environments, like the Adirondack Park, in regards to "Directly [affecting] neural activity" and "Preventing depression" (Van Den Bosch, 2016, p. 160).

Many studies have shown the benefits of access to outdoor spaces and recreation, for health and overall wellbeing. It has been revealed that this access has a particular benefit for younger demographics of people. Studies have found that:

> "Young people derive a variety of benefits from spending time outdoors. For example, participation in various types of structured and unstructured outdoor activities can strengthen children's academic achievement (Coyle 2010), conservation attitudes (Chawla 20017; Wells and Lekies 2006), social relationships (Ginsburg 2007), mental health (Burdette and Whitaker 2005; Taylor, Kuo and Sullivan 2001), and physical health (Maller et al. 2006; Sallis, Prochaska and Taylor 2000)." (Lincoln et al., 2013, p. 90)

The evidence pointing towards the benefit of access to green spaces and outdoor recreation from a young age further emphasizes the significant impact this access has on one's wellbeing and livelihood.

There are many factors that influence an individual's access to green spaces, including (but not limited to) race and socioeconomic status. Saporito and Casey investigated the dynamics between social, political and economic factors. It was emphasized that "Results have generally shown that people of color and lower-income groups tend to live in neighborhoods with less green space than their more-advantaged counterparts" (Saporito & Casey, 2015, p. 113). This economic separation, which is directly intertwined with race, influences the distribution of neighborhoods and their proximity to green spaces. This direct relationship has resulted in a gaping inequity between communities and their access to green spaces, further disadvantaging certain demographics and their overall wellbeing. Authors Saporito and Casey describe this disparity:

> "Consistent with much of the literature on racial and economic segregation--and studies of environment (in)justice--we find that lower-income people and members of minority groups live in neighborhoods with much less vegetation than their wealthier, white counterparts and their differences are exacerbated in racially and economically segregated cities." (Saporito & Casey, 2015, p. 113)

With this staggering data showing a disproportionate impact on people of color, there seems to be support claiming that this lack of green space impacts one's overall wellbeing. It was noted that "a variety of health benefits could result from exposure to green space. For example, mounting evidence suggests that being within physical proximity, or even merely having visuals of green space, can support mental health and promote restoration

from stressful circumstances" (Astell-Burt et al., 2014, p. 1). With this being said, it becomes apparent that access to a green space, such as the Adirondack Park, for recreational uses as well as maintaining a sense of wellbeing is important for everyone to experience.

There is significant data and research that cites "leisure constraints," "limited socioeconomic resources," "cultural factors and boundary maintenance," and "discrimination and white racial frames" as some of the major limiting aspects of peoples' access to National Parks (Scott & Lee, 2018, p. 73-82). Analyzing the inequities within national park access through the lens of constraining factors "Illuminate[s] why people of color do not make greater use of NPS areas, particularly those parks that are remote and where outdoor recreation and scenery are major attractions" (Scott & Lee, 2018, p. 73). These factors have a crucial impact on one's ability to have the time and resources for visiting a national park, and the ability to participate in recreation and leisure activities while feeling safe at the same time.

Getting to the root of what influences an individual's access to national parks is essential—not only for addressing the racial and economic inequalities that permeate all aspects of life, but also for national park managers. For national parks to be a safe and welcoming space for people of color, park managers must understand these constraining factors, which would allow "Park managers... to develop strategies for allaying the conditions that inhibit visitation," which will result in "The benefits of national parks [accruing] to a broader cross-section of Americans" (Scott & Lee, 2018, p. 74-75). While this is important knowledge for park managers to have in order to make parks more inclusive, many of the factors are tied to broader systemic issues of racial and economic injustice. In regards to limited socioeconomic resources, "Racial and ethnic discrepancies in income, education, and employment persist in the U.S.," and "Blacks earn far less income than Whites, even when two groups have the same education level" (Scott & Lee, 2018, p. 75). Many of these factors require systemic change, through political, economic, and social restructuring. Author Mott sums this up succinctly, stating "The diversity problem facing national parks runs deeper than race; it is arguably based on a long standing trend of marginalization, lack of access to the parks by minorities, and possibly, racial discrimination" (Mott, 2016, p. 447).

Beyond the immediate, concrete economic and social factors that cause this racial disparity in access to national parks, there are also deep-rooted sentiments that cause people of color to feel unsafe and unwelcome by their white counterparts in national parks. An African American travel author articulated this, saying "We possess an unsubstantiated belief that we just don't belong. And so we stay away" (Mott, 2016, p. 456). While the author labels this belief and feeling as "unsubstantiated," it could be rooted in the persistent notion that spaces such as national parks are made for, and cater towards, white people. There is often a sense of unsafety amongst BIPOC park visitors, and a fear of targeted acts of racism. Statistics have shown that "Roughly a quarter of all racial minorities surveyed by

NPS found national parks to be unsafe or unpleasant," with "One potential reason for the 'unpleasant or unsafe' response may be due to racial minorities' feeling of unwelcomeness" (Mott, 2016, p. 459).

One person, an African American woman named Mrs. Saxton-Ross, described her experience of feeling unsafe in certain parks. She explained that her grandmother would only take her to Swope Park in Kansas, since it was the only one that African American people were permitted to visit at the time (Mott, 2016, p. 459). Even when the parks were desegregated, "Her 'grandmother wouldn't take her to other parts of the park... for fear that something bad might happen'" (Mott, 2016, p. 459). This sense of fear and unsafety is also perpetuated by acts of direct racial bias and violence. A study of African American park visitation in St. Louis "Reported the reason they did not camp was because they felt vulnerable to 'racial intimidation,'" and reports from Al Jazeera revealed that "Many prospective visitors worry about disparate treatment by and implicit bias of park staffers" (Mott, 2016, p. 460).

The Differing Meanings of "Wilderness"

Another key point to note is that exclusion does not just stem from this history of racism. It has also been influenced by the concept of wilderness, and how spaces containing wilderness are perceived by people. It was said that "the environment discourse presented wilderness as a pristine, endangered place unspoiled by civilization and untouched by human hands" (Taylor, 2000, p. 172). Despite this, wilderness has also been labelled by a contradicting definition, one that claims it can be human-made. It has been deemed to be a space that is pristine, and that allows for nature to flourish, but has also turned into something that we create for our own benefit. We created this notion to help us escape urban life and give us a sense of relief. However, this is a very set way of thinking and defining nature and wilderness. This was created by those who have the ability and the means to escape urban life, and feel welcomed in the environment that they wish to escape to (Taylor, 2000, p. 72). Nevertheless, this encompasses the exclusive properties that exist between white people, who can experience the relief and benefit from the aspects of nature and wilderness that they intended to receive, and people of color, who experience the uncomfortable, unsafe, and exclusive side of wilderness that has long existed throughout history.

The History of "Wilderness" and How it Creates an Exclusive Environment

Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo's article "Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race" explains the roles that white, elite individuals have played in constructing ideas of American wilderness. The focus of their article is Yosemite National Park, and the ways that writer John Muir and photographer Carleton Watkins' depictions of the park helped create a racialized notion of wilderness that greatly influenced the direction of the nation's environmental movement. For the first one hundred years of the environmental movement in the U.S., there was

a complete focus on preservation of the wild. This narrative left little discussion about why these places were preserved in specific ways, as well as how they were preserved for the use of a specific group of people. In the mid 20th century, scholars began to deconstruct the idea of wilderness. As Deluca and Demo write, the growing body of works that examine the construction of wilderness "point out the implicit race, class, and gender connotations of wilderness and note the unintended political consequences" (DeLuca & Demo, 2001, p. 543).

The wilderness that John Muir's writings and Carleton Watkins' photographs helped create is defined as being both divine and separate from humanity. In 1861, Watkins took a series of photographs in Yosemite highlighting the park's dynamic landscape of towering cliffs and deep valleys. As these photographs gained popularity, writers like Edmund Burke published essays about the "subliminal" qualities of the nature captured in them (DeLuca & Demo, 2001, p. 547). Soon enough, Yosemite Valley was commonly being compared to European castles and cathedrals. Using religious imagery to compare these places to white civilization gave a clear indication of who should benefit from their preservation. In 1864, Watkin's photographs of Yosemite Valley were referenced by California Senator John Conness. For him, these images served as evidence for the necessity of legislation protecting Yosemite "for public use, resort and recreation." (DeLuca & Demo, 2001, p. 547). This furthered the narrative that they should not be occupied by the Native Americans who lived in the Park at that time.

Yosemite became known as the first Wilderness Park in the late nineteenth century and the conceptualization of the park as a wilderness is directly tied to the removal of Indigenous people. Between the 1870s and the 1930s, Indigenous people were forcefully removed from Yosemite Glacier and Yellowstone National Park. The forced removal of Indigenous people from these areas of "pristine wilderness" was rationalized by the idea that Native Americans were "primitives, obstructing the progress of the nation's destiny" (DeLuca & Demo, 2001, p. 544). The "progress" that is being described here refers to a nation with preserved natural wonders that reflect religious and cultural themes present in white civilization. Indigenous people and their occupation of these lands did fit well with this biblical-based, white preservationist narrative. After his visit to Yosemite in 1865, Samuel Bowles wrote that the decision to preserve the park was both "a blessing to….all visitors" and "an honor to the nation" (DeLuca & Demo, 2001, p. 543). Of course, these "visitors" were predominantly white, upper class individuals who wanted to view a sublime and divine wilderness that was unoccupied by humans. In his 1868 best-seller, The Parks and Mountains of Colorado: A Summer Vacation in the Switzerland of America, Bowles specifically addressed the need to exclude Indigenous people from wilderness areas. He wrote, "We know they are not our equals… we know that our right to the soil, as a race capable of its superior improvement, is above theirs; therefore, let us act directly and openly our faith… Let us say to (the Indian)... you are our ward, our child, the victim of our destiny, ours to displace, ours to protect" (DeLuca & Demo, 2001, p. 544).

John Muir, who is often referred to as the founder of environmentalism, greatly contributed to the influence of wilderness imagery and its function within preservation politics (DeLuca & Demo, 2001, p. 550). The white wilderness that Muir writes about excludes

Indigenous people from these spaces. As Muir writes "The Yosemite Valley, in the heart of the Sierra Nevada, is a noble mark for the traveler" "whether tourist, botanist, geologist, or lover of wilderness pure and simple." (DeLuca & Demo, 2001, p. 552). Muir saw nothing wrong with the removal of Native Americans from Yosemite National Park because they did not fit into the elite, romantic wilderness that preservationists like himself were attempting to create (DeLuca & Demo, 2001, p. 554). Celebrating Muir and his wilderness preservationist narrative continues to exclude people from outdoor spaces like Yosemite National Park.

Wilderness and the Removal of Indigenous People in the Adirondack Park

Standing on top of a mountain in the Adirondack Park and looking out at the vast expanse of rolling hills and winding rivers, it is easy to imagine that no one has ever occupied these lands for longer than a few nights. The word "wilderness" is used to describe many of the most popular destinations for recreation in the Adirondack Park. These include "The High Peaks Wilderness" and "The Dix Mountain Wilderness." To further understand the reasons behind the exclusion of minorities from outdoor recreation in the Adirondack Park, it is important to analyze the meaning of the word wilderness. Pastore describes wilderness as an "idea led by Euro-American men with the historical contextual context of patriarchal colonialism" (Pastore, 2020, p. 34). Similarly to the Adirondack Park, many of America's most popular National Parks and natural wonders also hold the title of wilderness. Using the wilderness narrative to guide the preservation of parks and forests in the U.S. is ultimately linked to the exclusion and erasure of Indigenous people and their histories from their land (Pastore, 2020, p. 41). In reality, all of these public lands, which are commonly thought of as completely and forever wild, have thousands of years of inhabited history by Native Americans. Therefore, wilderness defined as places that have never been touched by humans is a social construct that does not actually exist in America (Pastore, 2020, p. 36).

To understand why outdoor recreation is dominated by white people, we first need to understand how white people came to occupy currently preserved areas such as the Adirondack Park. Pastore describes, "The philosophical separation of humans in these preservation narratives hinges on the idea of nature as a binary opposite of society, therefore symbolically and materially placing humans strictly, and often violently, outside of preservation areas." (Pastore, 2020, p. 40). Ward writes about how before, and after, the beginning of colonialism in the U.S., the Adirondack Park was home to the Haudenosaunee people who are also commonly referred to as the Six Nations. Prior to European contact, the Haudenosaunee people were free to move throughout the land, which is now called the Adirondack Park, and participate in seasonal hunting and trapping activities that sustained their livelihoods (Ward, 2019, p. 78). During the 1830s, White settlers and resource industries expanded into the Adirondack Park. The introduction of mining and resource extraction in the Adirondack Park at the beginning of the 19th century greatly affected the ability of Haudenosaunee people to continue inhabiting their land (Ward, 2019, p. 79). Greater competition for land use caused by increased immigration from Europe caused many 19th century colonizers to identify as "Indian haters" (Ward, 2019, p. 105).

Ward writes about how after the American Revolution, “the Adirondacks were at times a place of violent encounters, especially between Mohawk and EuroAmerican hunters” (Ward, 2019, p. 78). “Indian haters” thought of the Native Americans living in the Adirondack Park as obstacles to the resources they wanted. Racialized violence towards Indigenous people continued into the early twentieth century, including the murder of two Oneida men in 1912 (Ward, 2019, p. 110).

The Adirondack Park has been conceptualized as a place of wilderness since the 20th century, when The New York Times publisher Henry J. Raymond wrote a piece on the Adirondack Park describing “a landscape of beautiful lakes, isolation, and ‘rough, rocky, and barren wilderness’” (Ward, 2019, p. 138). Today, the Adirondack Park continues to bear the title of “wilderness” in predominantly white outdoor recreation communities. Referring to the Adirondack Park as wilderness fails to acknowledge the violence and colonization that made this land uninhabitable for the Haudenosaunee people.

Exclusion Within the Adirondack Park

While there are many factors that may limit inclusion throughout the Adirondack Park, data shows that some of the underlying causes may be rooted in history. Through a study done at Azusa Pacific University, it was seen that “the cause for African American’s lack of participation in the outdoors rests squarely on the dominant White culture” (Fields, 2020, p. 1). Within this, it is noted that throughout history, white society as a collective has used its privilege to create exclusion and socially construct these racial categories. As there has long been deep-rooted racism on lands all across the country, it is now understood that to break this racism means to “create a sense of belonging in the outdoors for African Americans and truly knowing and understanding their history as a culture” (Fields, 2020, p. 2). With the engrained history of exclusion present in lands such as the Adirondack Park, it is essential to break through the racism and understand another history, especially of those who were marginalized. The discrimination has been present for hundreds of years, as was noted by Golebiewski is his study of the treatment of people of color dating back to when they were enslaved by their white counterparts. Through all of this, it was seen that in recreation activities such as hiking, white tourists generally benefitted from the rewards that it brought.

The engrained racism in the park has created the environment that is now seen there. In census data from the mid 1800s, the population of several towns surrounding the Adirondack Park consisted of less than a total of 70 people of color among thousands of white people. Due to this, these people were automatically characterized as ‘slaves’ and set apart from others. This division by race was seen then, and is even seen now, with the white privilege being expressed through tourist demographics in the park, as mentioned above (Svenson, 2017, p. 9).

Although it is up to travelers to make the parks more inclusive, it is also the duty of officials to create a more welcoming environment and to continue to break down the barriers that racism has ultimately created. Schiavo explained that there has been general discomfort

around the lack of trust in the Park Service for trying to diversify public lands. Without the trust of officials making parks around the country more inclusive, people may not feel compelled to do so either (Schiavo, 2016, p. 1). Through NGOs and the personal efforts of people around New York, as well as the country, there seems to be hope in creating a more inclusive space that others or the park service may not have time to prioritize. Specifically, Outdoor Afro is one such group helping people break down barriers and experience the Adirondack Park and other parks as they should be experienced by everyone. In particular, they help Black people interact with the natural world. They are actively "changing the visual narrative, and inspiring access to the most pristine nature as well as urban nature" (OutdoorAfro, 2019, p. 1). By doing what others won't, this organization is narrowing the gap between people of color and a sense of safety and inclusivity in outdoor spaces.

Methods

Population and Setting

Data for this qualitative case study research was collected in upstate New York, primarily in Saratoga Springs and communities near Keene Valley. We chose to do our research on the Adirondack Park because of the clear lack of inclusivity within the park since its establishment in 1885 (Wills, 2018, p. 1). Our study group included people who live in or near the Adirondack Park. We conducted 9 interviews and collected 570 survey responses from people of varying demographics in age, race, and socioeconomic status. It was important to collect data from both people who are involved in outdoor activities in the Adirondack Parks as well as people who cannot (or do not) visit the Park. We made efforts to hear specifically from BIPOC to highlight the experiences and perceptions of marginalized identities in the Adirondack Region.

Early in our research, we found that youth groups are potential platforms for making recreation in the Adirondack Park more accessible. Part of our research included interviewing and surveying youth groups to understand their current diversity initiatives as well as what they need to become more inclusive organizations.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this qualitative research effort include:

1. To what extent do adult respondents believe the Adirondack Park to be a safe and inclusive environment for users of all socio-economic and racial backgrounds?
    a. What influences respondents' sense of safety in spaces like the Adirondack Park?
2. What factors limit an individual's access to the Adirondack Park?
3. What does the term "wilderness" mean to different groups of people? And how does this context affect one's perception of the Adirondack Park?
4. How does one's identity shape their sense of safety in the Adirondack Park?

5. What innovative civil society interventions are working to support and expand diversity and inclusion in the Adirondack Park, and what more can/should be implemented?

Qualitative Instrumentation

Online surveys

Our qualitative methods were triangulated via the collection of 570 online surveys with adults and minors via Qualtrics (Creswell, 2013). The survey consisted of 28 questions and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey included open-ended responses, multiple choices and sliding scales, and worked to gain a better understanding of respondents' perspectives on several topics related to inclusivity and access to the Adirondack Park, factors that people feel are most influential in relation to their access to public lands/spaces like the Adirondack Park, and how circumstances such as race, socioeconomic status, transportation, and leisure time affect this access. The survey aimed to better understand the concept of "wilderness," and how the significance of this term varies from person to person.

In addition to the concept of wilderness and factors related to access, the survey explored respondents' feeling of safety, or lack thereof, in the Adirondack Park. The last question of the survey incorporated a request for contact information inviting survey respondents to conduct a follow-up semi-structured interview at a later time.

Semi-structured interviews

Additionally, our research incorporated 9 semi-structured interviews with 12 representatives from regional conservation organizations, as well as 2 adult members of the public (ages 18-70, male and female) that lasted approximately 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded using a digital voice recorder. Interviews explored the above mentioned topics, in regards to factors that influence access, the concept of wilderness, and sense of safety. The interviews with representatives from regional conservation organizations allowed us to gain insights into the work being done to create a more inclusive environment for everyone, as well as learn more about the realities of being a person of color in the Adirondack Park. Interviews with members of the public worked to better understand personal experiences in relation to Adirondack Park visitation. The interviews we conducted with representatives from youth groups allowed gave us an understanding of existing work on inclusivity as well as which initiatives need to be introduced and further developed. In addition, interviews explored potential solutions and innovative programs that visitors would like to see implemented in the Adirondack Park, in order to bolster inclusivity and visitation by BIPOC community members.

Sampling Techniques

Surveys were administered both in-person and online. Posters advertising the survey link were posted around locations within the Adirondack Park (specifically more diverse towns), as well as the MountainMan store in downtown Saratoga Springs, and on Skidmore College campus, where people scanned the QR code for accessing the survey. We traveled to towns surrounding the park to distribute the survey posters. The online survey link was advertised through Facebook and social media groups related to visiting the Adirondack Park, and through our contacts in the Adirondack Diversity Initiative. We also contacted the Adirondack Mountain Club and other organizations to gather information about the youth recreation programs After this, we distributed our survey to these families as well as staff at AMC. Through purposive sampling, we administered the survey to people of color, to better understand their perceptions of inclusivity in the Adirondack Park. Through Facebook groups dedicated to hikers of color, as well as organizations such as Outdoor Afro, we want to be sure to hear their voices as much as possible, since the trails and outdoor shops might mainly have white visitors present. As such, we worked with the Hikers of Color Facebook Group to distribute our survey link via social media and newsletters, as our research worked to better understand the first-hand experiences of BIPOC and members of marginalized communities, in relation to visiting the Adirondack Park.

Because our research worked to better understand inclusivity within outdoor recreation in the Adirondack Park, some of our research respondents included people who use these spaces for recreational activities. One effective method was posting our survey link at the entrance of popular trail heads in the Adirondack Park through a QR code. An advantage to this method is that, given that we included questions about how our respondents identify racially, we also generated data on the amount of people who visit these trail heads according to racial identity through online data.

Our research employed random convenience sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis and Limitations

After all our data is collected, we compiled all of the survey responses and transcribed digitally-recorded interviews to a word-processing software. They were then read through in order to determine any patterns in our findings. These interviews over Zoom, in compliance with safety standards.

Our findings are shown through tables and graphs to determine trends, as well as through written responses that relate to our research questions. In our research, we use Creswell's narrative approach to data analysis, where we can analyze for five elements of plot structure (characters, setting, problems, actions, and resolution) (Creswell, 2013). By doing so, we hope to cast the problem of inclusivity in a more realistic light, where the actions require solutions for change to be made. These findings were proven valid by the various sources we found and the background research done on previous findings.

Through the course of our research, many limitations were encountered that hindered the project. The onslaught of COVID-19 prohibited us from distributing our survey in-person as well as across Upstate New York. We found that it was particularly difficult to travel to different organizations and put flyers with our survey near trails, since meeting places around trailheads has diminished because of the pandemic. In addition, we found that communicating through email with our stakeholders was extremely compromising and face-to-face interactions would have worked significantly better. Interviews with stakeholders and survey respondents took place over Zoom, which was difficult in that internet connectivity issues allowed buffering to occur in our meetings.

Findings

Survey Responses

After developing a survey, we sent it across Facebook groups, websites, and posted flyers with the link around town. In doing this, we garnered 570 responses. Of these, 434 people were white, 32 were people of color, and 30 stated "other" as their ethnicity/ race. Some questions included if respondents thought the Adirondack Park was an inclusive space for people of color to recreate.

These responses are seen in **Figures 1** and **2**, where responses are split up between white respondents and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) respondents.

When white and BIPOC respondents were asked which racial demographics were seen while visiting the park, 471 of the respondents noted white, 269 said Black or African American, 164 said Latinx, 81 said Indigenous, 272 said Asian, 29 said Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 35 said other.

Figure 1: n=77

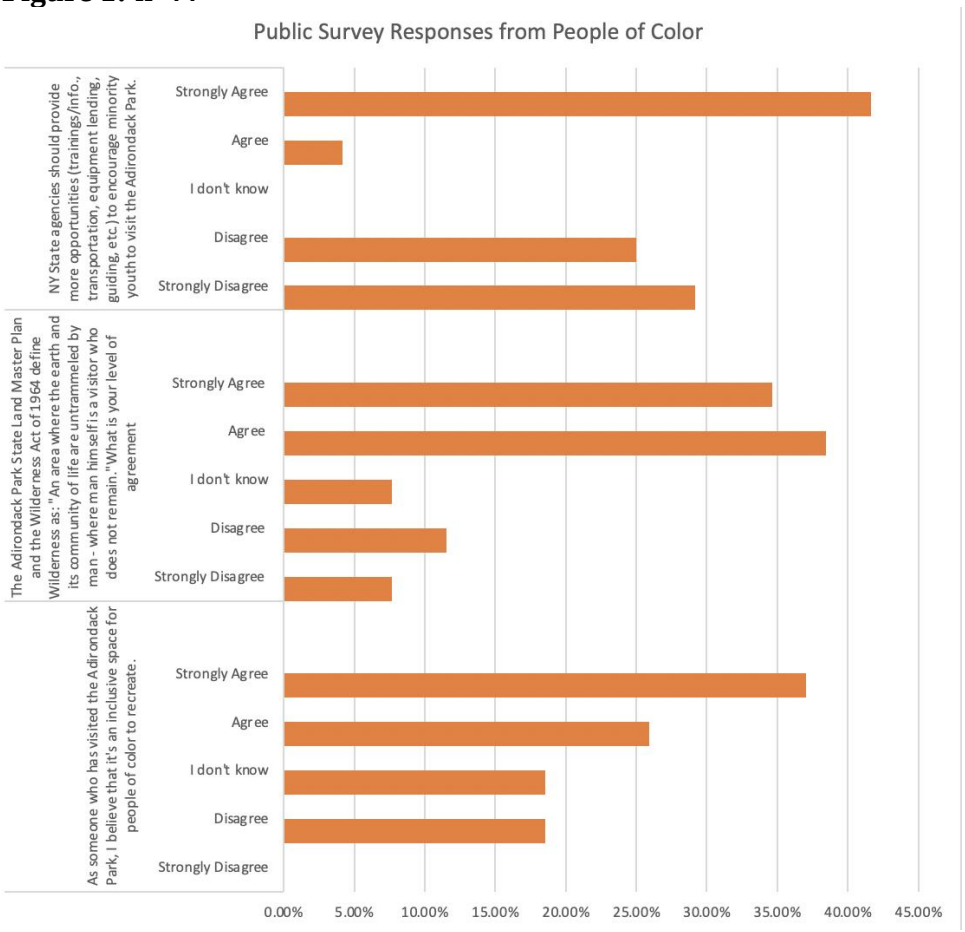
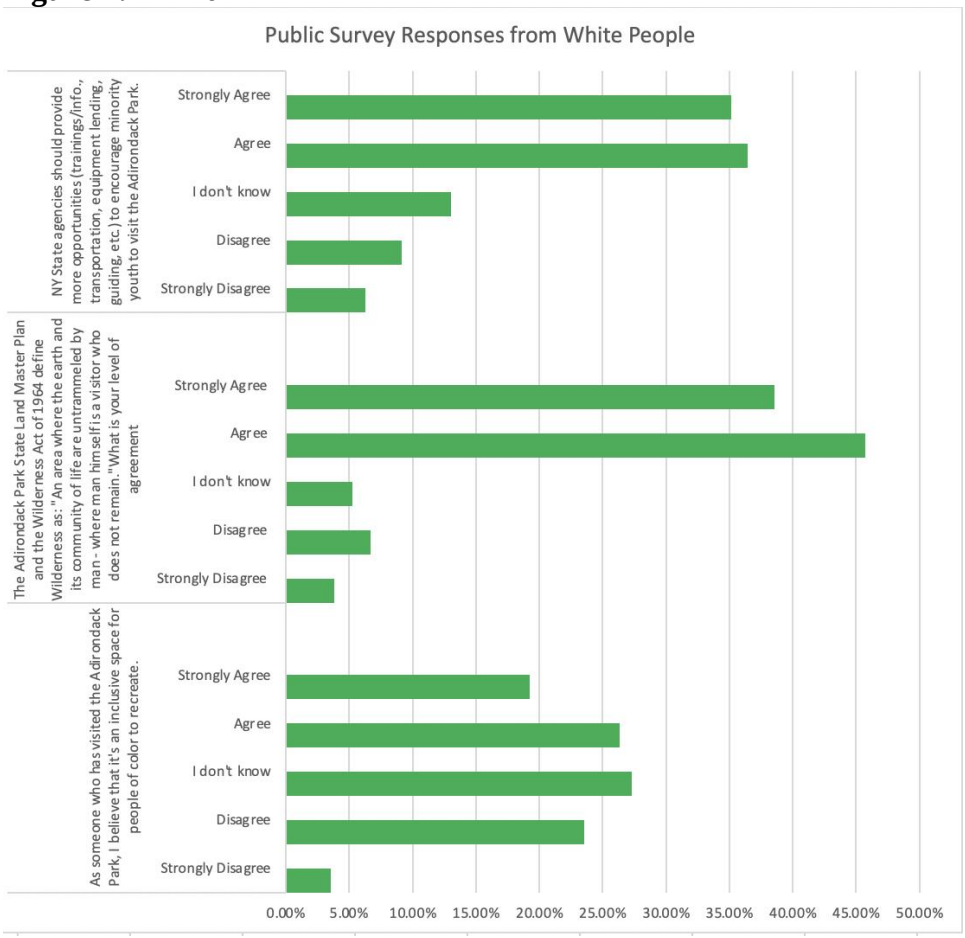

Public Survey Responses from People of Color
NY State agencies should provide more opportunities (trainings/info., transportation, equipment lending, guiding, etc.) to encourage minority youth to visit the Adirondack Park.
The Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan and the Wilderness Act of 1964 define Wilderness as: "An area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man - where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." What is your level of agreement
As someone who has visited the Adirondack Park, I believe that it's an inclusive space for people of color to recreate.
Strongly Agree
Agree
I don't know
Disagree
Strongly Disagree
0.00%
5.00%
10.00%
15.00%
20.00%
25.00%
30.00%
35.00%
40.00%
45.00%

Figure 2: n=420



Perceived Racism

Through dialogue and survey responses, it was noted that a large reason as to why there is a lack of diversity is that there is a strong presence of racism in the towns surrounding the park. One survey respondent wrote:

"I have students (college) who have suffered racism when near or entering the park and who feared traveling to the park for fear that their car might break down or that they might meet unpleasant people at trailheads or on trails. Racism in the park is not an abstract concept; it is a dangerous and damaging reality for those who are not in the white majority."

This occurrence is not isolated, as racist incidences were seen to be a recurring theme amongst reasons for people not visiting the park, or as something that should be changed to increase visitation, as seen in **Table 1** with white respondents, and **Table 2** with BIPOC respondents.

Table 1 displays the answers white respondents gave to the question regarding what aspects should be implemented to enhance their experience in the Adirondack Park.

Table 1: White Respondent Answers to How Their Experience Can be Improved in the Adirondack Park

Fees/Parking	Recreation Programs/ Education	Overcrowding	Training	Funding	Racism	Transportation
More parking at trailheads and better built trails.	More education programs, especially for new hikers. We should encourage more people to come, just give them the knowledge to be prepared and respectful.	More rangers and efforts to better manage overcrowding and educate users on appropriate behavior in wilderness.	Training in wilderness survival could include indigenous practices in order to bring more awareness to native culture.	More state $$ needs to be allocated for forest rangers and trail preservation and care.	It would be more welcoming to visitors if there were no confederate flags being flown and all the Trump signs were taken down.	More public transport, it's difficult to get there without owning a car
	Actually I am using the Adirondack less because of the overcrowding and visitors with limited to no knowledge of the outdoors and a general disregard of others and disregard for the environment.	Parking is overcrowded, no need to increase visitation.	Training on how to be inclusive in the outdoors and what white people can and should do (or should not do) put on by park rangers or some other organization (who have undergone training or education of some kind themselves).	Provide more staff and funding for the APA and DEC to perform their legislative purposes.	I think you need to educate racist white people to be more tolerant. There are many small-minded people in the North Country sadly.	Public transit to the Adirondack Park and various trailheads, better management of parking at popular trailheads
	Have classes or programs lead by people of color that are free or low cost.	Some areas are way too crowded for anyone to get a wilderness experience. Crowds are destroying the trails.			There needs to be a cultural shift in outdoor recreation in general, in order for BIPOC to feel accepted.	
	To improve the park experience I feel that a significant increase in education and infrastructure will be needed.					

Table 2 displays the answers that BIPOC respondents gave to the same question of how their experience can be improved in the Adirondack Park. Many of the responses were similar to those of white respondents, despite white respondents noting the need for less racism and more funding. Patterns were noticed among issues of overcrowding and need for better education of trail maintenance. Differences arose with BIPOC respondents, where park rangers were cited more as an aspect to be changed, as well as time constraints.

Table 2: BIPOC Respondent Answers to How Their Experience Can be Improved in the Adirondack Park

Fees/ Parking	Recreation/ Education Programs	Overcrowding	Training and More Rangers	Transportation	Time
Any program that somehow reduces the traffic and parking close to the trailheads - e.g. better shuttle services.	Any educational programs that improve trail etiquette	Overcrowding is an issue as is leave no trace education	More BIPOC individuals employed there	Better public transportation	It is kind of difficult to find time to travel to the park between school work and other work. I think creating a program through school that had going to the Adirondack Park as part of it would get me to go more than I do now.
Programs which provide affordable temporary housing for groups to utilize, since the cost of living in the Adirondacks are the largest hindrance to my staying there and enjoying the park.					
At some hiking trails, the state currently restricts parking, thus affecting access to the wilderness. NY state can encourage more visitors to the parks by decreasing regulations.					

Need for Funding and Issues of Overcrowding

Many respondents noted that a lack of funding has prevented positive change to occur. Due to issues of overcrowding on the trails, respondents stated that more staff should be employed to help monitor proper trail etiquette as well as ensure that overcrowding be minimized. One respondent noted:

"Park agencies need more funding to support full time staff needed to maintain park facilities and support visitors so that parks can be safely shared by all members of the public. Long-time recreators like to blame newcomers for "destroying" wild experiences as they may not be as well informed on leave no trace practices and the like. NYS should better fund agencies and organizations to help care for on-site needs. More funding within existing educational systems can also allow for outdoor recreation to be included within school PE programs. The disparity in access to outdoor recreation by class and race in this country is ridiculous."

This funding will provide those who have never been to the trails before with important educational information on how to take care of the land as well as make sure everyone feels included in the area. With the instances of more people visiting the park, respondents have noticed that there are more occurrences of litter and vandalism, which is starting to deter some from continually visiting trails.

Stakeholder Interviews

Education

Table 3: Stakeholder Perspectives on How Education Can be Used As a Tool to Promote Welcomeness and Inclusivity in the Adirondack Park

Nicky Hylton-Patterson	David Epstein- Halevi	Eagle Island Camp	Adirondack Mountain Club	NY Department of Environmental Conservation
Our role at ADI is to provide the strategies and tools and to empower communities so they can do the work themselves.	They need to be sharing experiences and voices of people who don't look like one another.	It was going to be about our own self-examination and this rigorous going inward before we could even start to act.	The philosophy of the summit stewards is to be very educational.	Tell us what you want to do, and we'll sort of match you with the facility that's going to meet your needs.
I do a lot of lessons and classes and so on to empower people to take responsibility for their own communities and starting with themselves, because you can't do the work as a white person if you have not already done the self-reflective work that you need to do.	Our schools are the engines of violence that reproduce the violent society that we look outside our windows and see.		I think if you invest and support the towns and you provide them with the tools that they need to achieve, you can help drive that cultural change that follows as well.	All of the equipment is provided to those who do the first-time camper program.

One common point that all our stakeholders touched upon during our interviews is the importance of using education to make the Adirondack Park a more inclusive and welcoming space for BIPOC. In our interviews with Nicky Hylton-Patterson and David Epstein- Halevi of the Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI), they emphasized the need for systemic change within public schooling. David explained the ways that current education institutions in the U.S. promote systems of violence rather than dismantle them. In saying this, he was referring to the ways that many schools don't educate their students on important issues like, for example, the violence committed against First Nations people and how to be in right relation Indigenous communities whose land you're on.

When we interviewed Nicky, she emphasized the ADI's philosophy of democratizing and decolonizing education. She described how they are approaching this via an ADI liaison on each school board to work on diversity and inclusion. Nicky also told us about her new 100 program, in which she aims to recruit and train 100 individuals across the Adirondack Park to be facilitators in anti-racist communication. Another important point that Nicky made was the importance of self-examination, especially for white people, in order to learn about and re-construct your own personal biases. In our interview with members from Eagle Island Camp, they mentioned how Nicky had mentioned this to them as well, and how essential it is to self-examine before engaging in any action related to anti-racism.

Members of the Adirondack Mountain Club referred to education in the sense that towns in the Adirondack Park that are currently unwelcoming for BIPOC would benefit greatly from resources and educational tools that promote anti-racism. They also spoke on behalf of their summit stewards (stewards who are located at the summits of certain mountains in the

Adirondack Park) and how they promote welcoming environments by educating new hikers without judging how much (if any) related knowledge they already hold.

In our interview with the NY Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), we learned about how their organization functions as an educational tool for people who are new to outdoor recreation. They spoke about how many people who are new to outdoor recreation are discouraged by the overwhelming number of places to recreate in the Adirondacks. To address this issue, they created a reservation system which uses a serious of questions to match individuals with a location that is right for them. The DEC also spoke about their first-time camper program, in which all necessary gear is provided. At the end of this program, the campers are able to keep their gear and use the skills they learned on the program to go camping on their own. By educating people who are new to camping how to recreate safely outdoors, they hope to make outdoor recreation more accessible.

Staff Hiring/Training

Table 4: Stakeholder Perspectives on Ways to Make Staff Hiring Processes More Accessible and Strategies for Implementing DEI Staff Training

Nicky Hylton-Patterson	Eagle Island Camp	Adirondack Mountain Club	NY Department of Environmental Conservation
(The importance of) making sure that black and brown and Indigenous children understand what these spaces are theirs to	The campers are going to feel safer if they can see themselves in the staff, so you want to make sure that they're reflected back and who we hire.	For a nonprofit to be truly successful in things like diversity initiatives, the board needs to be representative of those initiatives and supportive of those initiatives.	As a committee, we usually choose a training or a podcast or a video where we all watch and then we have a meeting and conversation about those
They deserve and have the right to be here, and those careers are not exclusionary to rich white middle class.	Who do you recruit first and how do you make sure that you're creating the safe space for each party?	We would really like to work towards better representation of more diverse people in the outdoors so that they can say, oh, I do fit in these spaces.	We provide resources and trainings to each other and then we celebrate the cultural month that we're in

Another trend in our semi-structured interviews with stakeholders was the topic of diversifying staff and training current staff about diversity, equity, and inclusion. In our conversation with Nicky Hylton-Patterson, she spoke about the need to promote jobs and leadership positions in outdoor recreation not only to middle/upper class white folks, but also to BIPOC of all backgrounds.

Staff members at Eagle Island Camp have been working with Nicky for a year on how to make their hiring and training processes more inclusive. They described how this process started with self-reflection and becoming aware of the elements of their camp that may be barriers to BIPOC. While everyone we talked to at Eagle Island Camp expressed a need to diversify both their staff and their campers, they were unsure of where to start. As the explained:

“The campers are going to feel safer if they can see themselves in the staff, so you want to make sure that they’re reflected back in who we hire. But should we want to bring in a whole bunch of diverse staff and then put them in charge of a bunch of rich white kids? That doesn't feel good either. So

how do we make sure that we have that balance and recruit? Who do you recruit first and how do you make sure that you're creating the safe space for each party?"

Eagle Island Camp is doing the meaningful work of asking themselves challenging, and important question such as this. They are also taking concrete actions to make their job applications more accessible to BIPOC. Some changes they made to their applications were including any salary information upfront, adding a sentence at the top of their hiring page and job descriptions saying they are welcoming bipartisan members of the community to apply, and minimizing the amount of previous experience needed. The explained their decision about to minimize the amount of previous experience necessary for job positions as follows:

"We had previously listed that experience with camp activities was a requirement. But we could take a step back and realize that it's not really a requirement because that's very classist. To say that you've been able to canoe in the past. Is that really a requirement or do we just want you to be willing to learn? So, it now says that you just have a willingness to learn about camp activities. Because honestly, when I thought about it, having a counselor who doesn't know how to canoe is almost just as valuable as someone who doesn't know how to canoe, because that means there's somebody alongside that camper going, I don't know how to do it either. And I'm scared."

Relations With Indigenous People

Table 5: Stakeholder Perspectives on Ways to Build Relationships with Indigenous People in the Adirondack Park

Nicky Hylton-Patterson	David Epstein-Halevi	Eagle Island Camp
For you to designate someone wilderness, you've got to clear out the people.	I think most of us are in such deep states of denial about what we've done to our Indigenous communities here.	The last thing that they want is for their child to feel tokenized when they arrive on the island.
You change the brand, and you show that you are working to make sure this place is welcoming, inclusive and belongs to everyone.	These are living communities and they are excluded from their own homeland and backyards.	Summer camp culture is one that is very cultural appropriation to their people

As stated in our literature review, the Adirondack Park is located on Haudenosaunee land. In our interviews with Nicky and David, they both addressed the how concept of wilderness as an untouched space ignores the forced removal of Indigenous people from their homelands. They both expressed the importance of rewriting the narrative of the Adirondack Park as a place that excludes Indigenous people through building relationships with First Nations people.

When we interviewed Eagle Island Camp, they told us about how they are currently working with the ADI on a program where Indigenous campers can come to the island with their parents and be fully integrated into the day camp but also have a place to stay with their parents in the evening and night. The intention with this is to create a space where Indigenous kids can speak and learn their languages.

Interviews with Survey Respondents

We conducted a semi-structured interview with anonymous survey respondent 1, who identifies as a person of color, and she described her personal experiences in the Adirondack Park and how she has been treated while visiting. She described that her family has been active in outdoor sports and recreation for years, so they frequented the park. While discussing how often she hikes in the park with her family, she mentioned that she does not typically see many other African American people.

"We haven't seen that many African Americans, especially hiking. I've seen a few more now, but they're more the younger people. But in terms of people our age, forget it. Especially minority or black or the people of color. I haven't really seen that many older people. In fact, it's not something that they're really doing. But for younger people, we're seeing that age group because they're continuing to do outdoor stuff as well. So that's something that I'm kind of surprised by. I've also seen more Asian people. In the Catskills we see a lot of groups of Asian people that come and do a lot of hiking, and they are older in their 40s and 50s, maybe 60s. But I haven't seen other people of color our age group. So we're kind of an anomaly."

Within this, she expressed how she was fortunate enough to not have experienced racism in her trips to the Adirondack Park but is also sure to be friendly to whomever else she sees. She also expressed how better representation of people of color on brochures and advertising for the park will help increase visitation for people of color:

"I think if they had more diversity in their advertising, it would go a long way for getting more visitors and making [the park] seem as though it's more open."

We also conducted another semi-structured interview with anonymous survey respondent 2, who also identifies as a person of color. She expressed how she has been hiking in the Adirondack Park for a long time and explained how her son started a club at his Albany high school to get more young people of color outdoors and into nature. She noted how it is tough to get young people outdoors and also create a sense of welcomeness:

"Specifically, with COVID this year, it was a good impetus for starting something like this [club] for multiple reasons, but particularly regarding equal opportunity to the wilderness. As a parent, I have worked with school groups here in Albany and through the school system to bring kids outside. And it's apparent that there are a ton of obstacles for the disenfranchised, let alone a person of color."

Engaging young people in recreation, and getting them outdoors, has been a factor that many of our survey respondents emphasized in being a vital part of increasing inclusivity. Anonymous survey respondent 2 also mentioned another experience, when she organized for a group of parents to bring their children on a short hike to get them exposed to nature.

"This early exposure helps kids relieve some of the misconceptions they have. And then there was a kid who found a dandelion and seed and he was like, 'What's that?' I told him, of course, to pick it up and to blow on it and make a wish. And he had never done that before. This little African American kid who lives down in Albany had never done that before. And here he is. He was a seven-, almost eight-year-old at the time."

She also mentioned her personal feelings about being in the park, and how the atmosphere of the surrounding towns often makes her feel uncomfortable due to the political climate:

"With this particular president that we had, there were a lot more implications, I think, regarding race than there were with other Republicans before him. It wasn't party-based, it was candidate-based. It makes me feel uncomfortable if someone has eight Trump 2020 signs in their yard, I don't feel comfortable. I don't feel safe, actually."

While it is pertinent that organizations such as the DEC take measures to help promote inclusivity in the towns surrounding the park, half of the park is privately-owned land, so they cannot sensor this free speech. Nevertheless, education in these communities is increasingly important and becomes a foundation in cultivating inclusivity amongst visitors.

Discussion

Through our discussions with numerous stakeholders and community members, there has been a general sense of optimism expressed about the work that has already been accomplished, as well as the work that is currently being done, to increase inclusivity and diversity in the Adirondack Park. In addition, the regional Diversity Committee of the DEC has expressed interest in hearing the recommendations from survey respondents, to take them into consideration and implement them into their own programs. Another uplifting initiative that is creating effective change is the Adirondack Diversity Initiative's 100 Program. Through this program, the organization is training and recruiting one hundred park staff members in nonviolent communication. Ideally, this will not only create a more inclusive space but will also allow people of color to feel more comfortable visiting and recreating in the Adirondack Park, as well as interacting with park staff.

Through the research we conducted, we found that people of color do not recreate in predominantly white areas due to the racism and anxiety that are experienced in these areas. In addition, we found that many factors, such as transportation, cost, and overcrowding, also limit people from travelling to areas such as the Adirondack Park. After conducting our interviews and interpreting our survey responses, we found that what was concluded in our literature review aligned with what we found from our research. In addition, we found that our interviews illuminated other factors that inhibit people of color from visiting the park, such as a lack of education in hiking as well as a lack of accessibility for visiting the park based on time constraints.

These sentiments all highlighted the need to provide park staff and visitors with necessary education on how to hike, and trail maintenance, as well as creating a more inclusive hiring process within organizations and groups that facilitate outdoor recreation, for both young people and adults. According to Schiavo, unless park staff are compelled to do the work to create change, then others may be less willing to do so as well. This also creates a lack of trust in park staff and Adirondack Park organizations. In combatting this, future qualitative research in diversity and inclusion in the Adirondack Park should incorporate more native history of the area, more programs to welcome all people of color, and more initiatives aimed at decreasing overcrowding. In doing so, an increased comfort towards park staff will be present, and there will be a decreased notion of white privilege being expressed in the park, as noted by Svenson, as well as our stakeholders and survey respondents. The findings of our research corresponded with the evidence of prior research included in our literature review and highlighted new factors and aspects that may prevent people of color from visiting the Adirondack Park.

Our research team received some negative comments and pushback from community members and members of our survey audience, particularly in the advertisement of our survey on the Adirondack Almanack and the Adirondack Reddit page. There were discontent survey respondents and members of the public who expressed that they felt as though this research is unnecessary and unable to create change. This backlash only propelled us to pursue this research and has only further revealed the dire need for progress in making the park safer and more inclusive for all visitors. In conducting this research, it has been evident that the positive results have outweighed the negative, and the fight for inclusivity and diversity in the Adirondack Park is far from over.

Recommendations

Survey respondents had the opportunity to articulate what would increase their own visitation to the Adirondack Park. Some responses included informational programs that provide more history of the area, programs that are more welcoming towards people of color, an increase in parking options and decrease in overcrowding near the trailheads, and programs that aim to provide affordable temporary housing inside the park, since respondents expressed that the cost of living in the park deters them from visiting. In addition, numerous stakeholders expressed the increased need for community-level activism and individual action in order to create change. It was noted that the most effective way to create a more inclusive space is by taking direct action on the community level, instead of waiting for legislature to be enacted, which could take months.

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