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Ian Tyrrell Replies

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The responses to my essay ironically arrived while visiting Mount Field National Park in Tasmania, where a nature reserve had been gazetted in that colony in 1885, and a national park created (in 1916). These were events that reflected many of the complex impulses that I sought to understand in "America's National Parks: The Transnational Creation of National Space in the Progressive Era." Mount Field's built and "natural" landscapes impressed upon me the complexity of the park aesthetic, and reinforced the conviction that the park diaspora was the product of a global circulation that could not be deduced form any single source. No doubt Mount Field today has Internet access, but, *sans* computer, I undertook the trip to the Russell and Lady Barron Falls blissfully ignorant of the fine work that Astrid Swenson, Paul Sutter and Thomas Dunlap had undertaken in dissecting my paper and elaborating on its implications.[1]

These three respondents have provided a convincing and remarkably consistent context for the reinterpretation of the American national parks in transnational and international perspective. Dunlap, Sutter and Swenson correctly perceive three issues that I raised in my essay. One is the social production of memory and the place of wilderness in Euro-American memory; another the internationalization of the concept of a national park; still another the nature/culture divide and all that this concept entails for a social geography of conservation in the national and colonial spheres.

I accept Paul Sutter's central point that the scholarly history of national parks has in many respects moved on from the Nash–Runte line. Practitioners within American environmental history have delivered "trenchant critiques of the wilderness concept" and have undertaken "extensive historical research into [the parks'] social construction."[2] This I clearly acknowledged in print. So why did I write that "this [exceptionalist] narrative remains largely intact"?

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[1] On Mount Field National Park, see Debbie Quarmby, "The Politics of Parks: A History of Tasmania's National Parks, 1885–2005," unpublished PhD thesis, Murdoch University, 2006, esp. 64–77.

[2] Ian Tyrrell, "America's National Parks: The Transnational Creation of National Space in the Progressive Era," *Journal of American Studies*, this issue.

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I was thinking that the available and more nuanced work was "not followed through when it comes to creating popular narratives of American encounters with wilderness."[3] Burns's PBS documentary involved interviews with well-known environmental historians, yet their testimony neither contradicted nor deflected his interpretation, and the public responses to the program have been very positive.[4] Richard Sellars, whose work I might well have cited, has produced a more nuanced account of the national story,[5] though mostly devoted to the post-1916 park history and concerned throughout with the roots of administrative practice rather than with the cultural and social milieu that formed the substance of my paper.

The story of American national parks concerns, among other things, the construction of nature as a specifically national space, its institutionalization in a special bureaucracy, and its perpetuation via public memory, a process in which historians have been implicated. Burns's television series is another chapter in this story, and so too Douglas Brinkley's epic volume. The investigation of the public memory of the parks itself would need to be the subject of a separate essay.

A misalignment between general or popular interpretation and specialist environmental history readings may reflect the social production of national memory in the United States. These conditions are, however, only partly specific to the issue of conservation policy. Indeed, I am a past contributor to this larger work in my *Historians in Public*. I emphasized there the role of institutional and political conditions in the making of American historiography, and documented the long-term contribution of American historians to public debate within this framework. I did not deal with modern environmental historiography in a book that drew the line at 1970, but modern environmental history in the United States has been, since the 1970s, an important part of the same "useful-history" tradition, as had the National

[3] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History*, 1 (Jan. 1996), 7–28; Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Poachers, Squatters, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Louis Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[4] See http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/share-your-story/assets/templates/nationalparks/national_browse.php, accessed 8 Dec. 2011. I agree with Sutter's review of Burns's series, which is soporific and ponderous in effect, and hence irritating. This raises again the question why it received such favourable public reception. Paul Sutter, review of *The National Parks: America's Best Idea* in *Journal of American History*, 97 (Dec. 2010), 892–96.

[5] Richard W. Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

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Park historians before that time.[6] Environmental historians take consultancies, and engage with the National Park Service; they have served on boards such as the Wilderness Society and the Sierra Clubs. They speak to public concerns over key environmental issues, and several of them have become gurus. Just how that historical practice has influenced interpretation is uncertain, however. Given the extensive recent critical history of the national park concept and of wilderness, the persistence of older Whiggish ideas in popular consciousness remains intriguing.

Astrid Swenson astutely directs attention to certain factors that might explain the generation of such popular views internationally, and their persistence through time. She makes the valuable point that the sheer size of the United States and its power in the world helps to illuminate the focus on the American origins and unidirectional influence. That Yellowstone does, as Thomas Dunlap observes, figure in the creation stories of other national park traditions suggests that the image of US nature as a projection of European sensibilities remains one factor, but by no means the only influence.[7]

The three respondents accept the transnational and even global circulations of the national park concept. They understand that these are deserving of deeper attention from US historians. Dunlap, whose *Nature and the English Diaspora* goes further than others in understanding the national park in the Anglo diaspora of settlement societies, adds complexity and clarity to this story in his comment.[8] The dissemination of these views across national boundaries is truly subject to "the record of the varying fates ideas common to the culture met as people applied them around the world," including the different material worlds to which settler societies had ultimately to adapt. Dunlap and Swenson underline that within Europe and its empires lay important roots of a global conservationist ethic. Other authors before me have perceived this point. Some, like Richard Grove, have argued for specifically colonial roots of environmental thought.[9] In this paper I wished to emphasize the somewhat neglected European scene that Swenson has ably outlined but I do not doubt the existence of a global conservation circulation. The American place within these movements includes the unstudied work of Bailey Willis in Argentina,

[6] Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 173–74.

[7] For an example see Tom Mels, *Wild Landscapes: The Cultural Nature of Swedish National Parks* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1999), 81.

[8] Thomas Dunlap, *Nature and the English Diaspora: Environment and History in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[9] Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

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and that of lesser-known figures in the Philippines.[10] Sutter is quite correct in drawing attention to "how frequently problematic have been applications of America's preservationist ideals in other parts of the world".[11] As Swenson points out, the complicated projection of ideas of wilderness, conservation and national parks beyond the boundaries of Europe has been considered in a 2008 German Historical Institute conference, and will, I understand, be published in 2012. My Australian colleagues Richard White (no relation to the eminent Stanford environmental historian of the United States) and Melissa Harper have contributed to this work, and I have benefited from their knowledge.[12] For the United States, a gap remains in my own account here: the projection of national park values into the American formal empire in the Philippines.

Dunlap makes the point that a "nature/culture divide" is a key theme in my interpretation. He perceives the role of the reaction against mechanical civilization, something that brought the support of diverse constituencies. I accept his observation that a wilderness version was not exported because it did not exist – in its modern form at least. Sutter suggests that the modern wilderness view may be a more recent and transient product. This more recent history was outside the original period that I dealt with in my essay, but Sutter offers a chronology of this later intellectual shift, and I am indebted to his sketch of a possibly less simple and more contested process.[13] The nature/culture divide is linked with the imperial and colonial experience. Dunlap notes the way love of nature could take vastly different forms from preserving game hunting in colonies to seeking to preserve scenery at home. The relationship between these two deserves more attention, as does the process linking the mine or coal heap with the pleasing park in the social production of park spaces.

Even more than the critique of the nature/culture divide, I wished to emphasize this social production of space not in terms of the already tackled topic of who was excluded/erased from park presence or history, but the complementarity of spaces. The national park was not only a national space entrenched ultimately in a bureaucracy, but also a social space, designed to produce, reflect or deflect certain outcomes and promote certain aesthetics. I implicitly argued that class was an important element in the early emphasis

[10] Bailey W. Willis, *Northern Patagonia: Character and Resources: Text and Maps by the Comisión de estudios hidrológicos, Bailey Willis, Director, 1911–1914* (New York: Scribner, 1914).

[11] Sutter, review of *The National Parks*, 896.

[12] Richard White and Melissa Harper, "How Transnational were the First National Parks? Comparative Perspectives from the British Settler Societies," in Civilizing Nature: National Parks In Transnational Historical Perspective, Conference at the German Historical Institute, 12–14 June 2008. Copy courtesy of Richard White.

[13] See also Paul Sutter, "Putting Wilderness in Context: The Interwar Origins of the Modern Wilderness Movement," in Michael Lewis, ed., *American Wilderness: A New History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 168–83.

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upon scenery, but the role of scenic preservation societies was a complex and perhaps contradictory one; it remains to be seen how it was that figures such as J. P. Morgan and Edward Harriman appeared to be both supporters of development and producers of an aesthetic of scenic compensation. Here, I argued, the history of city and regional parks formed part of a continuum of experiencing and constructing nature in a highly mechanized world. The experience of Niagara and the Palisades Park provides an entrée into this issue. Historians of national parks can learn much from what the late Roy Rosenzweig, Elizabeth Blackmar and others have written on public parks, but the scenic-beauty people deserve much greater attention than hitherto given, and the history of public parks and national parks needs integration as part of a spectrum of responses to the aesthetics and politics of nature and nation.[14]

The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society (ASHPS) demonstrated the complexity of this conservation ethic. It combined public access with proto-ecological views derived in part from Hugo Conwentz, designed to preserve places it explicitly designated "wild" or "untouched", and both human and "natural" scenery.[15] Was it, as Swenson asks, influenced in seeking public access by the campaigns of the National Trust and the protection-of-the-countryside movement? There is no doubt that a feeling of being in a common enterprise across the Atlantic applied. But the national park movement became in its institutional phase different from ASHPS on public access. ASHPS deplored economic utilitarianism whereas the national park movement was captured in part and for a time by narrower concepts of specific economic efficiency. In a widely applauded 1912 address on "National Parks – The Need of the Future," given before the American Civic Association, the British ambassador Lord Bryce (a National Trust and protection-of-the-countryside figure), complained that "the automobile would destroy what may be called the sentimental charm of the landscape."[16] ASHPS agreed, and stood for a kind of social sustainability, which was a different and larger concept than economic efficiency. Just as wilderness ideas make more sense in the light of much later developments, the cultural and political context of Progressive Era debates over efficiency, resources and intergenerational equity needs to be recaptured in a more comprehensive analysis of the genesis of national parks in the era of Theodore Roosevelt.[17]

[14] Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), esp. chap. 7; William R. Irwin, *New Niagara: Tourism, Technology, and the Landscape of Niagara Falls, 1776–1917* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1996).

[15] ASHPS, *Sixteenth Annual Report, 1911*, 555; ASHPS, *Nineteenth Annual Report, 1914*, 320 ("untouched"); ASPS, *Eighteenth Annual Report, 1913*, 277 ("wild").

[16] James Bryce, "National Parks – The Need of the Future," *American Civic Association*, [Pamphlets] Series 11, No. 6, December 1912, 6–13, 10.

[17] This latter point is missing in Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks*, chaps. 1–2.

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