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Advertising and Social Media Strategy for America's National Parks: A Case Study of Congaree National Park

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Advertising and Social Media Strategy for America's National Parks

A Case Study of Congaree National Park

Abstract

Advertising for America's National Parks comes in many different forms but is highly limited for national parks with lower visitation rates and less funding. Congaree National Park located just outside of Columbia, South Carolina has a small budget for advertising and goals to increase their visitation rates and visitor diversity. Particularly, Congaree rangers hope to increase visitation from the local Black community which surrounds Congaree National Park. Rangers at Congaree mainly use social media to advertise but have also investigated other forms of advertising and fundraising as well, including a Friends of Congaree Swamp license plate. This thesis will show the importance of advertising and outreach for National Parks to increase visitation rates and to diversify visitation. It will also detail a volunteer project that was set up at the University of South Carolina to help the Congaree National Park rangers post more frequently on social media.

Introduction and Thesis Statement

America's national parks are world famous and draw visitors from all over the globe. From Great Smoky Mountains National Park to Grand Canyon National Park, these protected lands are staple representations of the beauty the American wilderness has to offer. But not all parks are created equal. Congaree National Park is one of the least visited and lesser-known parks in the country. Located only half an hour from the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina, the park boasts beautiful champion trees and has been crowned "the Redwoods of the East," yet many people have never heard of Congaree National Park. Throughout my thesis I will

investigate the advertising and marketing of the National Park Service, as well as the restrictions it places on national parks and how the United States markets and advertises its national parks to increase sustainable tourism and increase the diversity of their visitors. A large focus of my thesis will be on social media advertising, and how national parks can utilize it to target specific groups of people. Throughout my project, I will use Congaree National Park as a case study to see first-hand the impacts of visitor diversification and social media strategy. This thesis will show the importance of advertising and outreach for National Parks to increase visitation rates and to diversify visitation.

Approach Summary

The National Park Service has kept detailed numbers on visitation rates and funding for each national park throughout the years. The National Park Service's advertising methods will be an important feature in my research and will help me show the impact of marketing on the national parks and their visitation demographics. Many of the National Park Service's records are made public to the American people, making it easy for me to access quantitative information and statistics, as well as other case studies and national park history.

In addition to this research, I will be reaching out to rangers at Congaree National Park to inquire about Congaree's visitation rates and how they feel the park could improve its visitation rates and demographics. National park rangers are very knowledgeable about their parks and will be a great resource for me in studying each park and understanding park popularity.

I will also be working with Congaree National Park staff to increase their advertising, mainly through social media, and outreach to the local community. Congaree wishes to increase their visitation rates and diversify their visitor population to include more of the Richland and South

Carolina community, and therefore I will also be working with rangers and staff to increase outreach to the local communities. My thesis will include a volunteer opportunity that links journalism and digital design students with the Congaree National Park rangers to help them improve their social media advertising.

Limitations Placed on National Park Advertising

In the specific case of Congaree National Park, advertising and marketing of any kind is made particularly difficult due to lack of funds. National parks do not receive funding from the U.S. government to do much beyond protect and upkeep the land, and as a result there is no room in the initial budget to focus on promotions or advertising. Anything beyond upkeeping the land, and occasionally that as well, must be paid for through fundraising done by sources outside of the national government. Unlike most other national parks, Congaree National Park does not have an organization fundraising on their behalf. The Friends of Congaree Swamp is the most well-known group associated with the National Park. While the Congaree Friends group does state that they “support the park through advocacy, volunteer service, and fundraising,” (“Mission”) the official paperwork for the Friends of Congaree Swamp to become the National Park’s fundraising group has never been completed (Frey). While most national parks do have an official Friends group to support them, fundraising is not considered the primary goal of a Friends group. Instead, the National Park Service has deemed “friendraising”¹ as the focus for Friends groups, and states that fundraising should only be done if the goals of the Friends group

¹ “Friendraising” is a term used by the National Park Service in their guide for Friends groups.

The term relates to the way Friends groups aim to increase the value of their national park through various philanthropy efforts, not just through raising monetary funds (Sterkel 38).

require funds beyond what is available to the group. Since Congaree's Friends group is not focusing on advertising or social media strategy for the Park, it would be difficult for the Park to procure the funds to pay for advancements in these areas. National Park Service employees are not allowed to solicit funds themselves, so they must instead rely on Friends groups and other groups to do this for them (Sterkel 38). Larger national parks such as Yellowstone or Grand Canyon have much larger budgets for social media strategy and advertising, as well as more groups that fundraise for them, allowing them to have improved and farther-reaching advertising methods. While the Friends groups are the most common fundraising groups for national parks, any non-profit is welcome to raise money for national parks. Other fundraising often includes conservation or environmentalist groups, and in the case of Congaree National Park, includes groups working to protect the entire Congaree Biosphere.

In the case of Congaree National Park, advertising to increase visitation numbers may not necessarily be preferred. Park Ranger Jon Manchester expressed that during the pandemic the Park had increased numbers without being able to increase their staff or expand their facilities. Instead, Ranger Manchester has emphasized that Congaree National Park's advertising and outreach should focus on increasing diversity and visitation from the local community in Columbia. Increasing visitation rates can also be physically harmful to the Park if the trails and facilities are not designed to handle the foot traffic. If increasing visitation is something that Congaree would like to focus on in the future, the park rangers will need to make sure that it is done sustainably.

The National Park Service does not, however, limit or proof-read social media posts for each individual national park. This means the Congaree rangers can post quickly and without delay due to needing approval from the Park Service for each post. National parks can have any form

of social media they would like, except TikTok because it is a security concern for a United States government agency. In the future, Manchester would like to have University of South Carolina journalism and communications students help to create posts for Congaree National Park. Outsourcing post creation would allow for more posts and even longer videos to be created. Since all videos posted or distributed by a national park must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it is nearly impossible for Congaree rangers to make time to create a video to post online. If journalism students or design students were able to help create videos with captions and ADA standards, the students would be able to get volunteer hours, add published videos to their portfolios, and help the Park to have more content to post. While I was unable to source students to help create videos during my time at the University of South Carolina, I was in touch with many journalism and design professors who Manchester will be able to easily reach out to again in the future. My current volunteer program works with these same students for photography purposes and could easily be expanded to include video production and editing.

Social Media Marketing Strategy

If done correctly, national parks can use social media cheaply and effectively to advertise and increase visitation. While it does not reach all demographics, social media is the best tool available to Congaree National Park due to its cost and the rangers' familiarity with it. Social media mainly reaches a younger population and requires connection to the internet, and as a result will not reach all demographics. It does, however, have a larger reach than many other forms of advertising and is one of the only forms Congaree National Park would realistically be able to afford. While print advertising may be more effective to reach older or lower-income

populations who may not have reliable internet connections, print advertising is much more expensive and is something Congaree must use very sparingly.

Social media will not reach everyone, but Congaree National Park can use social media as a tool to target some specific demographics. Because Congaree's goal is to increase the diversity of their visitors and to reach the local community more, their social media strategy will be different from making general posts about the Park. Congaree National Park currently has accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, all of which are held by most national parks in the National Park System. When developing a realistic social media strategy for Congaree National Park, I compared all forms of their social media to that of other national parks. I focused most heavily on comparing Congaree's social media to national parks that were of a similar size and similar budget, since comparing Congaree to the larger parks would not be realistic or fair given their differences in resources.

Compared to other national parks of a similar size, Congaree has a lot of followers on their social media but does not get a lot of interaction. After speaking with Ranger Manchester, he informed me that the park ranger who had previously run Congaree's social media got the Park a lot of followers in other states far away. Since Congaree is attempting to target the local community more, having this follower base would not benefit them much. I continued to make my social media strategy without giving Congaree preferential standards since they already had a larger amount of followers than most comparable national parks.

Posting Consistency

Across all platforms, Congaree National Park had very sporadic and inconsistent posts. Comparable national parks that had much higher interaction rates and who appeared to be

reaching a larger community posted more often and on a more consistent basis than Congaree does. Redwood National Park, for example, posts every three days on average to update visitors on relevant information and trail closures, as well as just to post pictures and videos of the Park's scenery. Congaree could greatly benefit from attempting to post at least once a week on all social media platforms, even if the post is the same on each social media site. Ideally, Congaree would be able to post updates on their facilities daily or when needed as other larger national parks do; however, Ranger Manchester has expressed doubt that Congaree's current small staff would ever be able to reach that goal. Larger national parks often have members of staff whose main focus is outreach and social media, Congaree will likely not have a staff member who can make these features a top priority unless it is assigned to a volunteer or seasonal staff member, neither of which they currently have. Facebook and Instagram have features that allow the creator to make posts ahead of time and have them post later on. Ranger Manchester has used these services in the past to make many posts at once when he has time and to have them post automatically later. Manchester stated the biggest reason Congaree cannot post more is actually because of a lack of content. The park rangers cannot take pictures around the Park often, and if he was to create a video, it would need to comply with the Americans with Disabilities requirements. As a result, I have started a volunteer project that should help the Congaree rangers to have more content to choose from when posting. More about this project and the database it will create is discussed later in this paper.

Diversify Followers

With Congaree's goals to diversify the racial makeup of their visitors and increase visitation from the local community in mind, I paid special attention to how other national parks used their social media to target specific populations. Great Basin National Park, for example, interacted

with a lot of local sponsors in the area. Similarly, Redwood National Park interacted with a lot of other local and state parks and commented on news posts for their local area. Interacting with other local parks, sponsors, and the news is a wonderful way to have your park's social media show up on the news feeds of local community members. Many national parks also partnered with Indigenous groups or other historic or social groups in their area. I found when they partnered with another group's page, the national park's post was reshared many times and had a lot of interaction. I would suggest for Congaree National Park to partner with local community pages to further their outreach to the local population. This could include doing a partnership with the University of South Carolina, Sesquicentennial State Park, or other Richland County pages. To increase the diversity of Congaree's visitors, the Park could also consider posting more with local African-American groups such as the South East Rural Community Outreach (SERCO) Organization who works with the Harriett Barber House near Congaree National Park or the National African American Recreational Vehicle Association who is represented at Congaree's Swamp Fest every year. By posting content with these organizations, Congaree National Park will have a greater chance of reaching a more diverse population. The Park's social media content will probably have greater rates of interaction as well if they tag another organization in their posts or have their content posted on the organization's page.

While there are many different types of diversification, Congaree National Park's rangers have particularly expressed increasing the diversity of their visitors' racial demographics. In large, this is because the lack of diversity represents a lack of inclusivity from the environmentalist community and is alarming when compared to the local community's racial makeup. Congaree National Park's visitation is relatively diverse in other demographical aspects. The Park has a nearly equal amount of every age group visit, and while there is a larger proportion of highly

educated, middle-income visitors, there is not an astoundingly low or alarming difference in this visitation compared to the makeup of the population. Only 7% of visitors to Congaree National Park reported they had a physical or mobility condition, however this is not surprising since most visitors come to the Park to hike or participate in other physical activities (“Congaree National Park Visitor Study”). Congaree could consider focusing efforts to advertise the accessibility of their boardwalk to those with mobility conditions. This thesis, however, will focus mainly on the diversification of visitors based on racial demographics since the disproportion of Black visitors to the Park emphasizes a larger problem within the outdoor recreation advertising sector.

Congaree National Park License Plate

Though it has been discussed and debated for many years by Congaree park rangers, Friends Group, and other Congaree National Park associates, there has not been an official license plate created for Congaree National Park. Many other national parks, including the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Crater Lake National Park, and recently Hawai‘i Volcanoes National Park, have plates available for purchase through their state’s Department of Motor Vehicles (Ferracane). These vanity license plates feature backgrounds with scenic images from the parks and donate funds to the state’s national park. The plates have become increasingly popular in recent years, and more states have added their own license plates to the list of those available as it is good for both fundraising and advertising for the parks.

Though they can be expensive to create and start production of, in the end, these vanity license plates can become huge fundraisers for the parks. The one-time initiation and artist fee is often quickly paid for and the park will have a lasting fundraiser for years to come. For example, the Friends of the Smokies license plate raised more than fifteen million dollars in Tennessee and

North Carolina in 2019 (Hoar). While these vanity plates can raise a lot of funds for some national parks, many of the Friends of Congaree Swamp are hesitant to put their funds towards a license plate. They fear that the initial investment might not be worth the money that a Congaree license plate could fundraise. For one, Congaree Swamp does not have as large of a following as many other national parks that have vanity plates. Congaree also only spans one state and small area, and therefore a Congaree Swamp license plate might only be purchased by those in the Columbia, South Carolina area near the Park or by a Congaree National Park enthusiast. In contrast, The Smoky Mountains National Park spans two states and a much larger area, allowing for two state Department of Motor Vehicles' to offer the plate and for it to have a much larger buyer population (Cunningham).

When I spoke with Greg Cunningham, Congaree National Park's Chief of Interpretation and Education and Visitor Services, he expressed support for the license plate program and spoke about the excitement many of the Park's volunteers and staff had for the license plate. He hopes to get the Friends of Congaree Swamp on board with the idea in the future, especially once the Congaree Biosphere is more widely recognized. At the moment, however, many board members of the Friends of Congaree Swamp have had past experiences with vanity license plates that have not yielded the anticipated funds. While the Friends group would have the funds to initiate the production of a vanity license plate for Congaree Swamp, many of the board members have spent this money in the past only to see their vanity plates raise five or ten thousand dollars a year (Grego). Because of the cost of implementing such a project and with all of the doubts concerning the popularity of a Friends of Congaree Swamp license plate, these board members would need to see some very convincing projections to deem the project worth undertaking.

Right now, it can only be hoped that the Congaree Biosphere will become more widely recognized through social media and other forms of outreach.

Cunningham also expressed concern that Congaree's landscape might not yield an enticing artistic background for a license plate that motorists would like to purchase. He suggested, however, the license plate feature the synchronous fireflies. The synchronous firefly festival and event is widely recognized and only happens at a few places in the United States, one of which is Congaree National Park. Below I have included a sample mockup of a license plate I have created to feature recognizable features of Congaree National Park, including the bald cypress trees, palmetto plants, the boardwalk, and the synchronous fireflies. While this design is very simple, a similar outline could be followed by an artist to create a visually appealing license plate that recognizes many of Congaree and South Carolina's outstanding wilderness icons and can be submitted to the South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles for approval.

Image 1 - Friends of Congaree Swamp Vanity License Plate Mock-Up²



² This license plate mock-up was completed using Canva. If Congaree National Park was to use the design, an artist would be responsible for completing the design and making it compatible with Department of Motor Vehicle resources and production abilities. This mock-up is only to show a possible design feature for the license plate and should be viewed as a rendering of my ideas and those I interviewed about the license plate's ideas.

Local Community Reach

While Congaree National Park receives most visitors from all fifty states each year (Manchester), the majority of the Park's visitors are from South Carolina. In 2011, 52% of visitors to Congaree National Park were from South Carolina or adjacent states, and nearly one-third of all visitors to Congaree National Park were from Congaree National Park's home county or the adjacent county ("Congaree National Park Visitor Study"). Today and in the decade of time since 2011, South Carolina visitors have consistently made up about 55% of all Congaree National Park visitors (Grego). There are many benefits to having a local visitor population but Congaree park rangers have also expressed hopes that there will be an increased out-of-state visitation rate. Congaree is not the only national park to experience mostly local visitors, however. In 2020, the National Park Service reported that "50% of total recreation visits occurred in the top 23 most-visited parks" ("Visitation Numbers"). Given there are over four hundred national parks in the United States, this leaves a small proportion of total visitation rates to the parks that are not at the very top of the tourist list. Often a large amount of the visitation at these "smaller" national parks comes from the local communities surrounding the Park. Only the top national parks who can afford to market and advertise widely, or who are more widely known to the United States population and the world, will attract a large out-of-state population. Unfortunately, until Congaree National Park can increase their advertising and outreach beyond the neighboring counties and South Carolina, it may be difficult for the Park to increase an out-of-state visitor rate. In my experience, many people, even those who live in the nearby large city of Charlotte or even students living in Columbia, South Carolina, do not know Congaree National Park exists. Increasing social media advertising is a wonderful way to increase the Park's outreach, since it

does not have locational limits and can help more people to simply be exposed to Congaree National Park's existence.

One of the most notable differences between Congaree National Park visitors and the community surrounding the Park is the difference in race. The 2011³ visitor study of the Park from the National Park Service has shown most of Congaree's visitors come from the Park's home county or a county nearby. With 37% of the total visitors to Congaree being from its home county of Richland County, one would believe the population demographics of visitors would match that of Richland County. This, however, has proven to be very far from reality.

Congaree National Park is located in the city of Hopkins, South Carolina, which historically has a demographic makeup of mostly the Black community. At the time of the 2011 visitor study, Hopkins, S.C. was made up of 83% Black ("Hopkins, South Carolina Population:Census 2010 and 2000") and today the Black community is 84% of the Hopkins population ("Hopkins, South Carolina Population 2021"). A look at the demographic information of the four zip codes nearest to Congaree National Park show that today, around 68% of the total local community surrounding the Park is made up of the Black population. Chart 1 shows the racial makeup of the zip codes surrounding Congaree and compares to Chart 2 which shows the demographics of Park visitors at the time of the last visitor study. While the most recent visitor study of Congaree

³ The most recent visitor demographics study from Congaree National Park is from 2011 and therefore was the only option to use here. It has been confirmed by both Ranger Manchester and Professor Grego that origin (in-state vs. out-of-state and county) statistics as well as racial demographic statistics for visitors have not significantly changed from 2011 to 2021.

National Park's visitor demographics was done in 2011, the demographic makeup of these areas has not shifted to any remarkable amount since then. In 2011, these zip codes were still mainly composed of a Black population⁴. Today, Congaree National Park's visitor demographics remain almost entirely white as well.

In Chart 2, it can be seen that 90% of the visitors to Congaree National Park were white in 2011. After speaking with Park Ranger Manchester, it can be confirmed that there has not been much of a shift in the racial makeup of demographics of Park visitors over the past ten years. While it is clear Congaree National Park is being visited by the local white population, the Rangers have expressed they would like to see more of the Black population that actually represents the local community being involved with the Park. Most of the Black visitors tend to participate in different activities while visiting the Park, opting for fishing instead of hiking or camping (Manchester). In the next section of this thesis, I will discuss potential solutions to making the local Black population feel more welcome at Congaree National Park and some of the current reasons they may not take part in Park activities as much as the white population.

⁴ The zip codes deemed the nearest to Congaree National Park were 29061, 29052, 29044, and 29135. The four zip codes used in this statistic were all weighed evenly. It should be noted that while every one of these zip codes has a majority Black population, three have a Black population of under 68% and zip code 19052 has 93% black population, making it an outlier that increased the statistical percentage.

Chart 1 - Average Racial Makeup of the Four Zip Codes Nearest to Congaree National Park

Average Racial Demographics of the Four of Zip Codes Nearest to Congaree National Park

(29061, 29052, 29044, 29135)

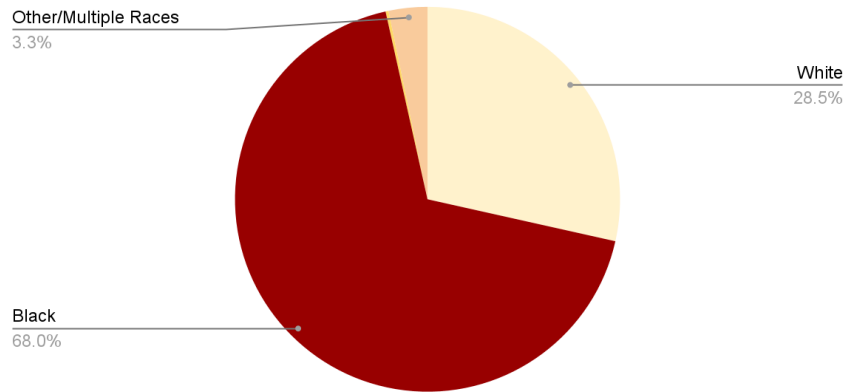


Chart 1 Data Source: "U.S. ZIP Codes"

Chart 2 - Breakdown of Congaree National Park Visitors (2011)

Racial Demographics Congaree National Park Visitors (2011)

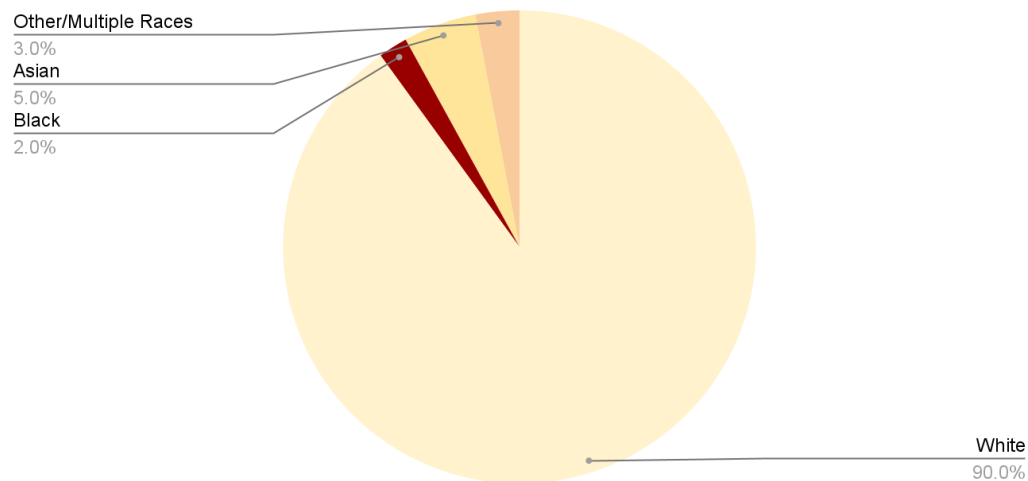


Chart 2 Data Source: "Congaree National Park Visitor Study"

While national parks tend to be visited by mostly a white population, Congaree National Park is an especially interesting case because so much of the surrounding population near the Park is Black. While most of the Park's visitors come from local areas, the question posed becomes why is the Black community not using the Park and taking part in the activities it offers?

Diversification of Visitors

History

Congaree National Park has a long-standing history with the Black community, dating back to the escaped slaves who formed communities back in the 1700s on what would become the Park's land (Karlin). Even though there is deep Black history within Congaree National Park, and especially within the larger Congaree Biosphere, none of this is represented through the National Park Service's website ("Congaree National Park History"). The National Park Service's page on the "History of Congaree National Park" talks in detail about the Spanish explorers who came to the area and the logging company who had control of the land right before it became a national park. Nowhere in the history recap is the dense Black culture or history of the land mentioned. Even on Congaree National Park's official website there is very limited information about the Black history within the Park. Only a short paragraph detailing the slave refuge communities who once lived on the lands is mentioned, and any pieces of more modern Black history or communities are left out entirely ("Congaree National Park - People"). Leaving out this important piece of Congaree's history not only insults the Black community and those whose family once lived on the land, it is also disrespectful as it takes away credit from the individuals who have shaped Congaree's environment to become what it is today.

As it turns out, the absence of Black participation in outdoor recreational activities might have resulted from a deeper cause than lack of representation in the media or in staff. There are many other theories about why white people tend to participate in outdoor recreation at national parks more often than any other race, but for the purposes of this thesis I am going to discuss problems Congaree National Park could attempt to alleviate. Many Black research participants did cite that the “stigma associated with slavery” as a factor which could potentially influence the poor relationship Black citizens in the United States have with outdoor recreation (Finney 59). While Congaree National Park cannot reverse the history of slavery in the South, acknowledging the history of escaped slave communities in the area, and other pieces of Black history, could be something to open the conversation with the local Black community about their collective memories and feelings of the past. Skipping over this part of Congaree’s history, as the National Park Service has done, will certainly not improve the Black community’s feelings about the Park or outdoor recreation. Instead, Congaree National Park should work on highlighting the ways the Black community has lived on the land and how they have shaped Congaree and Richland County to be what they are today.

Additionally, Black outdoorsmen may not feel welcome in Congaree National Park. While there are many theories that cite a lack of participation in hiking and other outdoor physical activities as a cultural component of Black culture, many argue this is not true and instead the Black population simply chooses different activities or outdoor spaces than the white population. In her thesis, Dr. Janae Davis relates both history and lack of representation in the media as the reason Black people do not partake in recreation at national parks. Dr. Davis cites that Jim Crow laws and other historical segregation practices gave the Black community a “fear of travelling outside of one’s ethnic space and perceptions of wildland recreation as a ‘white people thing’” (Davis,

16-17). Without an increase in representation or incentives to visit national parks, the Black community may simply still feel uncomfortable visiting a place they feel is made for white people and not for them.

Representation in Media

Arguably the most important piece in making Black visitors feel more comfortable at Congaree National Park, and anywhere for that matter, is representation in the media. Everyone wants to feel included, and it is difficult to feel as if yourself or your community are welcome to participate in an activity if members of your race or community are never pictured participating. Whoever controls the media has the ability to influence how stories are told and how populations think about themselves in relation to each story (Finney 6). In the case of environmental recreation, if Black people are not often shown in magazines or other advertisements participating in outdoor activities, they will easily feel as though it is not a part of their culture or something they are not welcome to do. There have been many studies supporting the “racialized outdoor leisure identity” (Martin, 514), but all of them emphasize the lack of any diversity among outdoor advertisements throughout history and in modern times. The environmental narrative has been historically white, dating back to the environmentalists of the Western expansion and Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency (Finney 3).

Luckily, representation in the media has a somewhat easy fix because of the increased use of social media. Because national parks can post their own images on social media, they may choose to increasingly post pictures of minority populations visiting the Parks or stick to posting pictures not including people at all. As mentioned previously, partnering with other organizations online who represent minority cultures is always a good way to not only increase the national

park's social media interactions, but to also show that the park is inclusive of all communities and backgrounds. When Great Basin National Park, for example, did a series of Facebook posts with a Native American organization's page giving viewers a history of the Native American community's life near the Park, it showed the minority community that Great Basin National Park was accepting of them and wanted to honor their history. While Congaree National Park already partners with the Historic Harriett Barber House to have Swamp Fest and Juneteenth Celebrations, these events are not largely represented on the internet or on the Park's social media. While there are many pictures taken of Park staff interacting with the local community at these events, Congaree National Park has not proceeded to post many of them. Posting more pictures from these events can show followers that Congaree National Park is a welcoming place for all races to take part in recreation. Increasing the representation of Black visitors and environmentalists on social media is also an important way to reach the youth of these prospective communities (McCown). Making sure the younger generations of all races and cultures have a positive relationship with the environment is becoming increasingly important, and national parks can play a key role in ensuring this relationship is built.

Diversification of Staff

As with representation in the media, who minorities see working at national parks may influence how welcome they feel to attend the parks themselves. In 1994, an article was written for the National Parks Conservation Association discussing the lack of diversity among national park visitors (Goldsmith). The article from over 25 years ago expressed plainly that a lack of diversity among national park staff could be to blame for this issue, and nearly three decades later the staffing ratios within the National Park Service have not shifted. Today, the National Park Service still employs 18% more white people than are represented in the population. Less than

7% of the National Park Service is composed of Black employees, and even less are of Hispanic or Asian heritage (“By the Numbers”).

While someone visiting a national park may not believe the race of the park rangers and managers can influence their visit, studies have shown that white managers of parks and other wilderness areas often assume most visitors will be white and therefore tailor the experiences to white visitors. This can affect not only the activities that occur at national parks, but will have the most visual impact with exhibits and interpretive stories. These stories may focus predominantly on white history because only white rangers and managers plan the exhibits. (Taylor). While the study that proves white managers choose to mostly focus on white history dates back to 2000, new studies about implicit bias have shown there has been a shift away from anti-Black biases to neutrality (Charlesworth). Studies such as this one showing a decrease in racist views give hope to the idea that white managers and rangers might increasingly include pieces of Black history in their exhibits.

Not only do Black people feel alienated from wilderness recreation due to historical racism and under representation, they also use wildlife spaces differently. The Black community tends to use parks or outdoor recreation spaces for fishing or social gatherings instead of using them for hiking or camping as the white community does. Unlike parts of Congaree National Park, many national parks do not allow fishing and do not have many places for social gatherings, making them less tailored to activities Black visitors would enjoy and more tailored to those white people would enjoy. Congaree National Park does allow fishing in some areas, which increases the Park’s use by the local Black community, especially those whose families have been fishing on the land for many years previous to Congaree becoming a national park. Since the white National Park Service faculty may not realize that many Black visitors use the Parks for fishing,

visitation studies may not accurately capture the number of Black visitors if statistical surveyors have not thought to include fishermen in their numbers. Many studies have also suggested that Black visitors prefer more structured and social activities while outside, which most national parks do not cater to (Davis 18). Congaree National Park, however, does have many structured group activities as a part of their Forest Wellness Program. Based on the activities Black visitors enjoy while outside, it seems there is a lot of potential for the Forest Wellness Program to appeal to Black visitors if Congaree increases their advertisement for the program to this target audience.

Inclusion in exhibits is not, however, the primary focus for increasing Black acceptance in the national parks. Black visitors hope to see more inclusion of Black park rangers and managers as it would make them feel more included and more well represented in a major environmental organization. During her research for her book *Black Faces, White Spaces*, Carolyn Finney interviewed many Black people to see why they felt they could not comfortably visit outdoor recreation spaces such as national parks. The second reason these interviewees listed — they had fatigue from their previous experiences and now were inclined to “resist participating in events largely seen as white and where they feel they are expected to ‘represent’ the race” (Finney 65). If there was an increase in Black staff and volunteers in national parks, Black visitors may no longer feel as alone or as if they were the only ones in the Park “representing the race.” While this may not entirely convince Black Americans to visit parks such as Congaree, it would be a step in the right direction to hire more Black park rangers and to increase the outreach to the Black community for park volunteers. This increase would allow Black citizens to view members of their own race in these positions and in the outdoors in general.

Benefits to Diversity

If national parks are able to successfully increase the diversity among their visitors, there will be increased benefits for the rest of American society and even the world. Visits to national parks as children can become formative experiences for adults. These experiences can help them develop skills and values they will carry with them into their careers and everyday lives. Right now, too many of the Black and minority communities are missing out on these experiences (Scott). If children of the Black community and other minority communities are taught to have a good relationship with national parks and other outdoor recreational facilities, they will continue to use these facilities in life and later with their own children. This will start a cycle of increased diversity within the parks and will increase the number of visitors who are able to give back to the national parks, whether through funds or volunteer work.

A good relationship with the outdoor environment and appreciation for the outdoor environment is essential for any environmentalist. At the moment, environmentalism focuses on white culture and is mostly supported by white celebrities and communities (Finney 2), however this should not be the case. Global warming and other environmental impacts will affect everyone, regardless of race, and should be issues that are cared about by everyone. If Black children are introduced to a love of protected lands and the outdoors, they would become more likely to support environmentalism and would feel a greater need to protect their environment later in life. This would also benefit the national parks, since the Black community could fight for increased funding and rights for protected lands. Any additional advocates in the fight against land destruction and climate change help, and at the moment both problems are mainly fought by whites.

Diversity within staff and volunteers for the national parks, and within the National Park Service, will also benefit everyone through an increase in ideas. Diversity is proven to increase productivity, especially when it is present in both upper and lower management (Turner). For the National Park Service, this means employing more Black and minority employees not just as park rangers, but also as managers and within the upper levels of the National Park Service's office. Benefits will not only come from an increase in productivity but also an increase in ideas and increased accuracy in historical representations. As mentioned earlier, national parks such as Congaree National Park sometimes skip over minorities' cultural history. This could likely be because the white employees writing the history do not think to look at cultures much beyond their own historical background. In the Congaree example mentioned earlier, only Spanish explorers and logging company owners were mentioned in the history of Congaree National Park, both of which are white, European populations. Had a Black National Park Service employee looked over the Congaree history report, they may have thought to look towards the escaped slave communities and local Black population for a deeper, more accurate history of the Park.

Project Outline and Volunteer Work












After speaking extensively with Park Ranger Jon Manchester, we were able to determine that Congaree National Park is mostly in need of more content to post on their social media. While it may seem park rangers would easily be able to take pictures and videos to post online, Ranger Manchester quickly informed me park rangers spend most of their time in meetings or planning events and do not have much time to be out and about in the Park. Since Congaree does not have a lot of park rangers, they are not able to allocate someone who can focus on creating content to post. As a result, Ranger Manchester and I came up with a plan to have volunteers create the

content to post and submit it to a Dropbox for the Congaree park rangers to access. This way, there would be a database to choose from when the park rangers wanted to post content. Eye-catching photos of the Park are much more likely to be noticed on someone's feed than a blank square with captions or words announcing an event.

Image 2 - Dropbox Link and Preview ⁵

Dropbox / Congaree National Park Photos and Videos

[Upload](#) |
 [Create](#) |
 [Follow](#) |
 ...

Name ↑	Size	Type
 Bald Cypress Trees at Congaree During Flooding (1).jpg	☆ 1.35 MB	Image
 Bald Cypress Trees at Congaree During Flooding.jpg	☆ 734.45 KB	Image
 Congaree Boardwalk During Flooding.jpg	☆ 742.81 KB	Image
 Congaree National Park During Flood.jpg	☆ 761.97 KB	Image
 Flooded Bald Cypress Trees at Congaree.jpg	☆ 1.36 MB	Image
 Overturned Tree Roots at Congaree.jpg	☆ 0.97 MB	Image
 Roots of Overturned Cypress Tree.jpg	☆ 655.96 KB	Image
 Trees at Congaree After a Prescribed Burn (1).jpg	☆ 0.97 MB	Image
 Trees at Congaree After a Prescribed Burn (2).jpg	☆ 0.91 MB	Image
 Trees at Congaree After a Prescribed Burn.jpg	☆ 1.08 MB	Image
 UofSC AED Hiking Guided Hiking Trip.jpeg	☆ 7.02 MB	Image

⁵ You can view the Dropbox by going to:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/y3nml1uuvj5du02/AAC071MnpzXMVq_V5oWvETqYa?dl=0

If you would like to submit files, please email abigailcgallup@gmail.com to have a submission request sent to your email.

Expected Outcome

After only one semester of implementation, I currently have fifteen student volunteers registered with Congaree National Park and the National Park Service. These students have volunteered to take photos and videos while visiting Congaree National Park and submit them to the Dropbox, preferably edited but unedited photos and videos are also accepted. The Congaree Park Rangers can then use this database for photos and videos to post on social media and update the website. According to Ranger Manchester, Dropbox is the best way to share photos with Congaree National Park rangers and is the format which the rangers have the most experience with. The Dropbox folder “Congaree National Park Photos and Videos” can be found at the link in the footnotes above and has been shared with the volunteers and the park rangers.

While the Dropbox currently has few submissions, I have been informed by a handful of the volunteers that they have been out to the Park and have photos and videos they are currently editing and planning to upload soon. Many journalism and design professors have offered their students extra credit for submitting photos and volunteering. Professors in these disciplines were very excited about this opportunity for their students, as it would not only help Congaree National Park but it would also be a great resume builder for their students whether or not the images were published. In the future, these same professors could continue to be contacted at the beginning of the semester to share this opportunity with their students and to grow the program to further benefit the Park.

Potential Significance

By focusing my research on the marketing of national parks, I believe I can further my understanding of how the least popular parks could increase their popularity rates. In recent

times, there has been much debate over services such as the National Park Service that are funded by the government to protect our nation's lands. I believe the protection of these lands is important, but protection takes funding. A less visited park means a park with less funding, and I hope by understanding how a park can increase its visitation rates, it can then increase the funds it has for improvement and protection of the park's lands.

I am passionate about protecting the natural beauty of America, and I believe everyone should know how beautiful all of our country is. By increasing awareness of local but lesser-known parks, such as Congaree, it can help Americans to appreciate and value the environment of their home. By increasing the diversity of visitors to national parks, the entire population can have a more well-rounded appreciation for our natural environment. I expect by researching social media trends and strategies, I will help Congaree National Park to have a greater social media outreach. Improving their social media strategy can also help Congaree expand their visitation to a younger and more diverse population.

The quantitative research I do will help to emphasize why advertising is important for a national park, and how effective advertisements can be to bring in visitors. My volunteer time with Congaree National Park will have a direct impact on their outreach and will help them increase their social media presence and advertising all around. All national parks deserve to be valued and visited, and increasing our public knowledge of each park through the parks' marketing can help with this.

Annotated Bibliography

“By the Numbers (U.S. National Park Service).” *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/by-the-numbers.htm#:~:text=The%20NPS%20has%20about%2018,percent%20and%2013.4%20percent%2C%20respectively.>

This article on the National Park Service’s website features quantitative data on the demographics of National Park Service employees since the 1960s. I will be using this data to point out the continued lack of diversity among National Park Service employees at all levels. The National Park Service should be encouraged to hire a larger number of Black employees and a larger number of all minorities because this is an important step to increase visitor diversity.

Charlesworth, Tessa E.S., and Mahzarin R. Banaji. “Research: How Americans' Biases Are Changing (or Not) over Time.” *Harvard Business Review*, Harvard University, 2 Aug. 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/08/research-on-many-issues-americans-biases-are-decreasing>.

Because many of my quantitative sources regarding visitation rates are more than ten years old, I will use this source speaking about the differences in racism and implicit bias to back up why my findings and arguments are still relevant. This source shows that there has been some improvement in the past ten years regarding bias, so there is some hope that improvements have been made since the studies I will be using. However, the source says that overall numbers are the same and not enough has changed to truly make a difference, meaning that the study’s numbers I am using still hold true in today’s world.

“Congaree National Park - People.” *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, 7 Oct. 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/cong/learn/historyculture/people.htm>.

This particular page on Congaree National Park’s website details the history of Congaree National Park. It particularly focuses on the Spanish explorers and the logging company, with only a brief mention to the Black history and escaped slave communities of the National Park. Given the amount of Black history, both from centuries ago and more recently, that has occurred in the Congaree Biosphere there should be more of a focus on this history shown on the official website.

“Congaree National Park History.” *National Park Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/cong/planyourvisit/upload/History.pdf>.

The official history of Congaree National Park as told by the National Park Service itself leaves out a lot of history related to the Black population. While it focuses mainly on the Spanish explorers and the logging company that took over the land before Congaree became a National Park, it does not include the slave communities or anything else relating to the Black history of Congaree National Park. I have compared this history to a more in-depth history report done on Congaree National Park and will emphasize the differences.

“Congaree National Park Visitor Study.” *National Park Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, 2011, <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/663014?Reference=1047630>.

This quantitative study summarizes the demographics of visitors at Congaree National Park during 2011. Even though the study is slightly dated, Park Ranger Jon Manchester

and Greg Cunningham have assured me that demographics of Park visitors look pretty similar now to how they did in 2011. I have used the information from this report to highlight the lack of diversity among visitors and the lack of out-of-state visitors to Congaree National Park.

Davis, Janae. "A Tale of Two Landscapes: Examining Alienation and Non-Visitation Among Local African American Fishers at Congaree National Park." *University of South Carolina*, University of South Carolina, 2015. *Scholar Commons*, <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4141&context=etd>. Accessed 1 Dec. 2021.

This thesis discusses some of the differences in preferences the Black community has for outdoor recreation compared to the white community. It also summarizes many of the theories about Black visitation and why the Black population does not use National Parks at the same rates of the white population. National parks are set up mainly for the activities the white population prefers, and therefore will be increasingly visited by only whites. The thesis has been instrumental in verbalizing the differences in preferences and uses of outdoor recreational landscapes by both races.

Ferracane, Jessica. "National Park Specialty State License Plates Available at DMV Locations throughout Hawai'i." *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, 3 Aug. 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/havo/learn/news/20170803plate.htm>.

This website features information about the new license plate Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park released to be available at the DMV. The article is a good example of a vanity plate as well as the process for motorists to purchase a National Park License

Plate. The style of art used on the Hawai'i plate can be used as an example of how a Congaree Swamp license plate could be styled. The webpage article also lists some of the other National Parks that offer vanity plates as a form of fundraising.

Finney, Carolyn. *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Black Faces, White Spaces has been an extensive resource into the reasons the Black population does not visit National Parks or have an involvement with the great outdoors. It compares white and Black relationships with the environment and attempts to explain how the Black community's relationship with environmentalism became what it is today. The book also does a wonderful job explaining how the Black relationship with National Parks could potentially be fixed in the future, as well as steps the National Park System is currently taking to increase diversity. I will use this resource throughout my planning for Congaree National Parks' social media and outreach strategy, and while looking at how the National Park can increase their visitation from the local Black community.

Frey, Eric, and Abigail Gallup. "Meeting with Eric Frey." 2021.

Eric Frey has worked for the National Park Service for many years and has had experience with both Congaree National Park and other national parks. He spoke in detail about the Friends of Congaree Friends group, as well as the ideas surrounding the Congaree license plate creation. Frey was essential to my understanding of the National Park Service's legislature and how the system works from the inside. He also spoke in detail about the fishing rules at Congaree National Park and the differences between Congaree and some of the larger, more popular parks.

Goldsmith, Jack. "Designing for diversity.." *The Free Library*. 1994 National Parks Conservation Association 29 Nov. 2021

<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Designing+for+diversity.-a015441378>

While this publication is a little bit dated to be very relevant, it does show that the National Park Service has been criticized for many years on the basis of their lack of diversity. Particularly, their lack of diversity within their faculty and staff. I came across this publication while reading *Black Faces, White Spaces* and have used it in my thesis to support increasing the diversity of staff within national parks and to show that this is an ongoing problem in America that still needs to be addressed and solved.

Cunningham, Greg, and Abigail Gallup. "Meeting with Congaree Employee Greg Cunningham." 2021.

Greg Cunningham is the Chief of Interpretation at Congaree National Park. He also manages the Education and Visitor Services at the Park and works closely with Jon Manchester. During our meeting, Cunningham and I spoke about the engagement of the Black community at the Park, as well as the breakdown and demographics of most of the Park's visitors. Cunningham introduced me to Jon Manchester, who runs the Forest Wellness Program at Congaree National Park and who has played a large part in the implementation of my volunteer group.

Grego, John, and Abigail Gallup. "Meetings with John Grego, President of Friends of Congaree Swamp" 2020 - 2021.

Professor John Grego has been my thesis director throughout the semester and has often explained pieces of the National Park Service and Friends of Congaree Swamp to me. He has been a key piece in the development of this thesis as well as it's finished product. I have cited him as a source in this document because he has shared his experience with Friends of Congaree Swamp board members.

Hoar, Lauren. "Friends of the Smokies License Plates Raise More than \$15 Million in Tennessee and North Carolina." *Wbir.com*, 10 News, 29 Apr. 2019, <https://www.wbir.com/article/news/friends-of-the-smokies-license-plates-raise-more-than-15-million-in-tennessee-and-north-carolina/51-081d7583-cf78-4298-b86d-1ef4c3636ffb>.

This news article relays how much money the vanity license plate for the Friends of the Smokies raised in 2019. The Friends of the Smokies vanity plate is very well known and is one of the closest national parks to Congaree that offers a license plate. The Smokies plate is a good example of how successful a license plate can be and how much money can be fundraised for the corresponding national park. The information provided in this article can be used as an argument for why Congaree National Park should consider investing in the creation of a Friends of Congaree Swamp license plate.

Lawton, L. J., & Weaver, D. B. (2008). Factors Associated with Nonvisitation by Area to Congaree National Park, South Carolina. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 26(4), 66-82. Retrieved from academia.edu

By taking a survey of the local South Carolina areas, it is easy to see that the African-American population, which historically has surrounded Congaree National Park,

accounts for a very small proportion of the Park's visitors. While a large number of these non-visitors did not know about Congaree's existence, even more have wanted to visit and have not for various reasons. Visitation to areas of nature by local tourists can have an immense positive impact on both the Park and the visitors. Congaree falls under the category of transition from rural lands to urban-fringe, which can increase the visitation rates for the Park but have a substantial impact on the environment if the tourism is not sustainable. The information provided in this report studies the reasons that local residents, particularly those belonging to minority communities, have historically not visited Congaree National Park and how those visitation rates may be increased.

Hogenauer, Alan K. *MARKETING NATIONAL PARKS: OXYMORON OR OPPORTUNITY?*

This publication reviewed the limitations around National Park advertising and went over the reasons that many National Parks, especially in the United States, choose to not do any advertising. In other countries, however, advertising for National Parks and outdoor recreation spaces is more common. Hogenauer was able to speak about some of the ways that other countries advertised their outdoor spaces and how these same techniques could be helpful in America.

"Hopkins, South Carolina Population 2021." Hopkins, South Carolina Population 2021

(Demographics, Maps, Graphs), <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/hopkins-sc-population>.

A quantitative resource, this document allowed me to compare the difference between the population of Hopkins, South Carolina in 2010 and 2011 to 2021. The current Hopkins, South Carolina population demographics are very similar to that of 2010 and 2011, which

helps my findings about the difference in visitor demographics at Congaree National Park to still be relevant.

“Hopkins, South Carolina Population: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts.” *CensusViewer*, Moonshadow Mobile, Inc., 2012, <http://censusviewer.com/city/SC/Hopkins>.

This quantitative resource allowed me to make a pie chart and to compare the visitation demographics of Congaree National Park to the demographics of people living in Hopkins, South Carolina. I needed the census data from 2010 because the Congaree National Park visitor demographics study only had data from 2010 and 2011 and I wanted an accurate comparison. Comparing the two demographics against each other allowed me to point out the major racial differences in who lives in the local community and who chooses to visit Congaree National Park.

Karlin, Taylor. University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, 2015, *Deeply Rooted: The Story of Congaree National Park*.

This senior thesis, written by another University of South Carolina Honors College student, summarizes the history of Congaree National Park. The thesis emphasizes the Black community’s history in relation to the Park. It also includes the history of escaped slave communities. I found this thesis to be especially helpful when comparing it to the National Park Service’s history of Congaree National Park. The Park Service did not include a lot of the information about the slave communities or Black history that this thesis did.

Manchester, Jon, and Abigail Gallup. "Meetings with Park Ranger Jon Manchester." 2021.

Park Ranger Jon Manchester has been essential to the completion of my thesis. I have met with Jon many times throughout my thesis project, both virtually and in person. He has helped me to set up the volunteer program and group. I have also interviewed him about changes to be made around the Park and running the Park's social media. Most of my social media strategy suggestions have already been given to Jon and he has agreed with almost all of my suggestions. Jon and I have worked together to come up with solutions for Congaree's social media strategy and outreach to the local Black community.

McCown, Rebecca Estelle Stanfield. "EVALUATION OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE 21ST CENTURY RELEVANCY INITIATIVES: CASE STUDIES ADDRESSING RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ." *University of Vermont*, University of Vermont, 2011.

I came across the following dissertation while reading *Black Faces, White Spaces*. The source speaks of ways that the National Parks benefit minority populations and the youth. I will use this source in my paper to support my arguments for diversity and justify why it is important to focus on increasing the diversity of visitors in National Parks.

"Mission." *Friends of Congaree Swamp*, 12 Feb. 2015, <https://friendsofcongarree.org/mission/>.

The mission statement has been pulled directly from the Friends of Congaree Swamp website in order to maintain its integrity. I was able to talk with John Grego, the President of Friends of Congaree Swamp and my thesis director on many occasions regarding the

Friends group's intentions. However, since there was some debate between Grego and Frey about the Friends groups, I chose to use a direct quote from the Friends of Congaree Swamp website when speaking about their mission to support Congaree National Park

Papadogiannak, Eleonora i, et al. U.S. Department of the Interior, 2009, *Great Smoky Mountains National Park Visitor Study* , https://sesrc.wsu.edu/doc/205.2_GRSM_rept.pdf. Accessed 29 Nov. 2021.

The report features information about the visitors at the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Since this was the most visited national park in recent years, it is a good park to use to show differences between visitation diversity at a popular park and at Congaree National Park. I will specifically use this resource to compare the out-of-state visitors that larger, more popular parks have compared to the majority of in-state visitors Congaree National Park gets.

National Park Service, and S. Lock. "National Park Tourism in the U.S." *Statista*, 27 Aug. 2018, www-statista-com.pallas2.tcl.sc.edu/topics/2393/national-park-tourism-in-the-us/. Accessed 18 Sept. 2020.

The United States National Park Service's numbers for spending, attendance, and activities in each national park from 2008-2019. This data splits up the visitors to each park by time of year, activity, type of park, and how popular the park is. There is additional visitor information for the top national parks, as their visitation rates and visitor spending most affect the funding and development for the National Park Service as a whole. The U.S. National Park Service's research on these visitation rates was likely done to analyze their own funding for the parks and to help each national park itself to

better understand how it compares to the other parks throughout the country. This publication shows more recent and updated quantitative information that many other journal articles that often focus more on professional perspectives or the history of the National Park Service, This information and data help to summarize the uses of the national parks and serves as a good reference point for any analysis of the National Park Service over the past decade.

Pergams, Oliver R.w., and Patricia A. Zaradic. "Is Love of Nature in the US Becoming Love of Electronic Media? 16-Year Downtrend in National Park Visits Explained by Watching Movies, Playing Video Games, Internet Use, and Oil Prices." *Journal of Environmental Management*, vol. 80, no. 4, Sept. 2006, pp. 387–393., doi:10.1016/j.jenvman.2006.02.001.

The article's research shows a downward trend in visitation levels for national parks in the United States over the past 50 years and discusses some of the possible reasons for the decrease in visitation levels. The funding levels of national parks, as well as differing trends in other recreational activities in the United States are discussed in correlation to the decrease in the visitation rates as well. The authors of the articles and research, one being from the University of Illinois at Chicago's Department of Biological Sciences and the other from the Stroud Water Research Center, use regression formulas and other quantitative forms of analysis to compare the trends of visitation to the correlation of funding and other factors. The article is useful because it shows factors that can affect the visitation levels at all national parks, and it reports how funding levels and visitation do not necessarily correlate directly. Additionally, it emphasizes the stable decrease in

visitation rates to the parks and shows that there is a need to come up with a new way to interest people in the parks and pull Americans and foreigners to the parks.

Scott, David, and KangJae Jerry Lee. "People of Color and Their Constraints to National Parks Visitation." *The George Wright Forum*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2018, pp. 73–82.,
<https://doi.org/ISSN 0732-4715>.

This publication discusses some of the reasons it is believed that Black and Hispanic Americans do not visit national parks or other areas of outdoor recreation. This publication specifically speaks about different theories that date back many years and are at the root of cultural foundations. Scott and Lee discuss many times the different ways that psychology and cultural identity play into Black Americans choices to not visit national parks. I will use this source particularly to speak about the things that advertising and marketing cannot change in terms of increased diversity in visitation. The source also lists ways that minority populations are at a disadvantage throughout life because they do not have as good of a relationship with the environment as the white population. Scott and Lee discuss the ways that national parks benefit visitors, something that I will tie back to the benefits of increasing national park visitor diversity.

Simoni, Smaranda. "Ecotouristic Marketing Strategies in the United States of America." *EBSCO*, Banat University of Agricultural Sciences & Veterinary Medicine Timisoara, 1 Oct. 2011.

Field studies and data coming directly from the United States National Park Service was used to create this paper which looks at the marketing techniques the United States uses to advertise their national parks and promote ecotourism. Strategies of the United States

Park Service are analyzed and reported, both by each national park and overall. The paper has specific visual examples of advertisements that have been used in the past, and it even outlines how the Park Service is attempting to market the parks online and during the rise of the digital age. Unlike many other articles, this article directly links the marketing of the national parks to their visitation rates and shows the impact of the visitation on the economics of the local communities. The information reported and analyzed in this report shows the marketing techniques that are the most common and most useful for the National Park Service to be using and goes over how much advertising is done by the most popular national parks.

Sterkel, Marty. "An Introduction to Building National Park Service Friends." *National Park Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, Mar. 2008, <http://npshistory.com/publications/rtca/making-friends.pdf>.

The guide published by the National Park System outlines the duties and responsibilities of a Friends group for national parks. It reviews what Friends groups are supposed to do to help the parks, and what they are not supposed to do. Primarily, it goes over how to create and implement a successful Friends group. Part of this thesis studies Congaree's Friends group, the Friends of Congaree Swamp and how they can increase visitation and funds for Congaree National Park. This guide helped me to further understand how Friends groups worked and what a standard Friends group was expected to do.

Taylor, Dorceta E. "Meeting the Challenge of Wild Land Recreation Management: Demographic Shifts and Social Inequality." *Journal of Leisure Research*, vol. 32, no. 1, 13 Dec. 2017, pp. 171–179., <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2000.11949910>.

I found this source after reading *Black Faces, White Spaces* where the author had referenced it multiple times. This publication compares the changing demographics and cultural shifts in the United States to those within the National Park Service. Particularly, the source points out the differences between the National Park Service and today's cultural landscape. I will use this source to highlight some of the ways that lack of diversity within the National Park Service hurt visitors and the Parks themselves.

Turner, Lauren, and Maya Fischhoff. "How Diversity Increases Productivity." *Network for Business Sustainability*, Nbs.net, 25 Jan. 2021, <https://www.nbs.net/articles/how-diversity-increases-productivity#:~:text=Diversity%20results%20in%20better%20decision%20making.&text=Companies%20benefit%20most%20when%20upper,%241590%20per%20employee%20per%20year.>

The article talks about the benefits of diversity in the workplace. Since this paper mostly focuses on the benefits of diversity for visitors, I will not need this source much.

However, I do briefly want to touch upon the benefits of increasing diversity within the National Park Service. This article will help me to emphasize how hiring more minority and Black employees could benefit the National Park Service from within.

"U.S. ZIP Codes: Free Zip Code Map and ZIP Code Lookup." *UnitedStatesZipCodes*, United States Postal Service, U.S. Census Bureau, Yahoo, Google, FedEx, and UPS, <https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/>.

This quantitative source allowed me to look up the population's demographic makeup for the zip codes surrounding Congaree National Park. Comparing the population

surrounding Congaree National Park to those who visit the Park emphasizes the problem surrounding visitation by minorities and the Black community. Using zip code data is more accurate than using the makeup of the city of Hopkins, South Carolina where Congaree National Park is located. Using the entire makeup of Richland County would not be accurate enough since the county is very large.

“Visitation Numbers (U.S. National Park Service).” *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, 25 Feb. 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/visitation-numbers.htm>.

A quantitative source, this page listed the most visited national parks in the United States. It put how small Congaree National Park was into perspective and allowed me to compare it to not only larger and more popular national parks, but also to national parks with similar visitor numbers. Congaree National Park is not alone in its struggle to increase advertising and visitation, which makes this thesis all the more important.

Zou, Suiwen (Sharon). “National Park Entrance Fee Increase: a Conceptual Framework.” *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, vol. 28, no. 12, 29 June 2020, pp. 2099–2117., doi:10.1080/09669582.2020.1791142.

Charging entrance fees at national parks in the United States is a complex and often debated issue. This article speaks to how charging entrance fees could help the United States National Park Service to be able to increase funding for national parks and how fees can help each park to be able to support itself and less popular national parks. The article also shows quantitative data and research that was done on how charging entrance fees would affect visitation rates at the parks. The National Park Service helped in the research and commenting on the data found, and the author and lead researcher for the

article and its information is a part of the Department of Recreation, Sport, and Tourism at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The information found in this article is beneficial because it represents how national parks get their funding, and how increases in funding could be found but how that impacts visitation to the parks. Funding is an important aspect when determining whether the parks should be advertised or marketed more because of the cost of this advertising.

Timeline

December 2020

Select a Thesis Director and discuss my project with them. Begin considering my selection for a second reader.

January 2021-April 2021

I will begin contacting rangers at Congaree National Park and any National Park staff I may need to work with directly during this project.. I will start learning more about the Forest Wellness Program and developing a plan for increasing the program's outreach. After contacting Congaree rangers, I will begin to interview them and related National Park staff to get a better understanding of the advertising and marketing restrictions placed on National Parks, and the problems smaller parks such as Congaree may have with increasing outreach and visitation rates.

April 2021-August 2021

I will continue to develop my plan for increasing Congaree National Park's outreach and will stay in contact with the Congaree rangers during this process. I will begin to look at the past data and quantitative data for other National Parks to determine how the larger Parks run their advertising and outreach. I will also begin contacting other National Parks to determine the scope of advertising and how other Parks handle their outreach programs. I will continue my research and begin to relate what trends I have seen and any advice I may have to today's National Parks. I will find a second reader for my thesis.

August 2021-November 2021

I will begin to look at the outcomes and significance of my research and continue to work with Congaree rangers on their advertising and outreach programs. I will begin to draft sections of my thesis and apply my quantitative research to my analysis of the effectiveness of advertisements. I will quantify the time I have spent volunteering and apply what I have done and learned to my written thesis and research. I will begin drafting my thesis and putting all of the pieces of my research and thoughts together. I will email my Thesis Director with updates and hold phone-meetings with them in order to speak about my progress and any feedback they may have for me.

Late November 2021

I will select and submit my Second Reader information. I will finish the rough draft of my thesis and send it to my Thesis Director and Second Reader to review. I will begin preparing to defend my thesis and create a presentation for the thesis defense. I will schedule and prepare for my thesis defense.

Early December 2021

I will defend my thesis at the scheduled time. I will revise and edit my thesis draft based on the comments of my Thesis Director and Second Reader. I will finalize my thesis and submit my final draft to my Thesis Director and Second Reader for any final comments they may have on my thesis before I submit it to the Honors College.