

Who Benefits from America’s “Great Places?” Exploring Recreational Equity in the National Park Service, United States of America

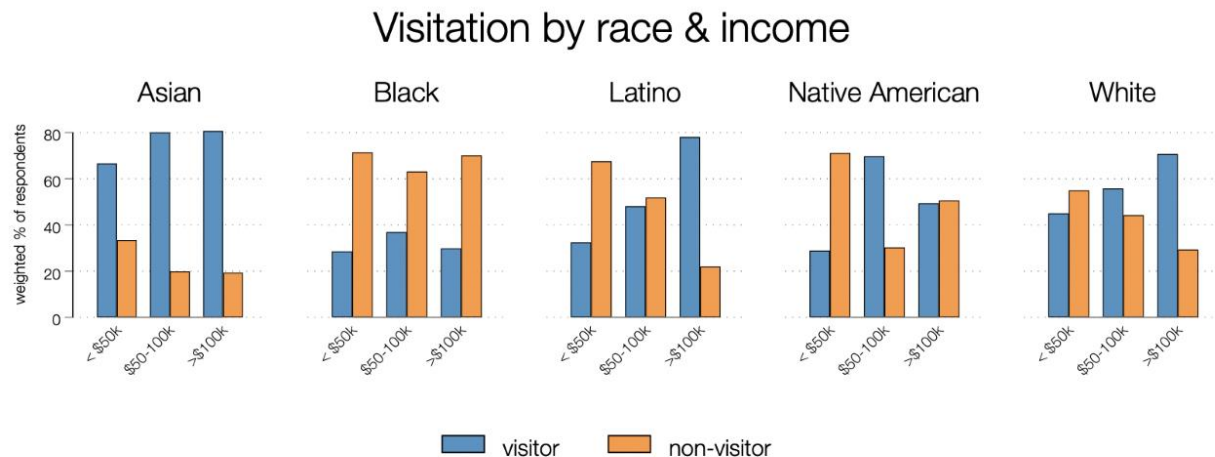
Ethan Landis Bird

Department of Geography, McGill University, Montréal (Québec) Canada

2022

Supervisor: Professor Brian Robinson | Reader: Professor Kevin Manaugh

In recent years, issues of equitable access and utilization of national parks have become a focal point of academic and popular discussions of racial and environmental justice. I investigate how the National Park Service (NPS) of the United States of America has implemented policy changes to fulfill its dual mission of preserving America’s “great places” and serving all Americans. I examine the NPS’ latest Comprehensive Survey of the American Public (CSAP) report to understand differences in *utilization* between different racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups, analyze NPS program websites to understand how the agency seeks to improve equitable *access*, and use the case study of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (SBDNL) to examine how local NPS units ensure equitable *access* and *utilization*. I conclude that while the NPS has made great improvements in recent years, there are still several concrete steps that they could take to further improve equitable access and utilization.



Percent of Respondents Reporting Different Levels of National Park Visitation by Race/Ethnicity and Income Level, Weighted NPS CSAP Data, 2018

(Figure Designed by Author, 2022)