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"Blackfeet Belong to the Mountains": Blackfeet Relationships with the Glacier National Park Landscape and Institution

David R. Craig

The University of Montana

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“BLACKFEET BELONG TO THE MOUNTAINS”:
BLACKFEET RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE GLACIER NATIONAL PARK
LANDSCAPE AND INSTITUTION

By

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National Parks are home to many landscapes of great significance to Native American peoples. The eastern half of Glacier National Park is considered a homeland by the Blackfeet people, and has historically been very important to their material, cultural, and spiritual well-being. This relationship, like those of many other Native peoples, has been severely disrupted by the establishment and presence of the national park, resulting in prolonged conflict between tribes and parks.

Blackfeet relationships with this cultural landscape require interaction and engagement in order to realize the full extent of its benefits. Often, these practices serve distinct material needs, however, the nature of Blackfeet relationships with the landscape are such that material, cultural, and spiritual needs are often interconnected. By restricting subsistence uses of the landscape, the national park simultaneously restricts these other intangible values which are important to Blackfeet cultural identity.

Conflict between the Blackfeet and Glacier is, however, much more complex than simply a struggle over the material benefits of the park landscape, whether for subsistence or economic reasons. Many Blackfeet support the national park for its role in protecting this significant landscape, particularly as a landscape representative of an authentic Blackfeet identity. Conflict is influenced by tension between the benefits of park protection and the negative effects the park has on Blackfeet well-being.

Tension is also fueled by the symbolism of the park, which is viewed by Blackfeet as part of a larger historical land and cultural dispossession by the federal government. Blackfeet are forced to navigate this terrain of hope and loss when dealing with the national park, for the park landscape embodies both an opportunity for cultural renewal, as well as a real sense of limitation and loss.

Blackfeet interview participants describe perspectives which identify both significant opportunities for cooperation and collaboration with the National Park Service, as well as obstacles which continue to fuel conflict.
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Chapter One: Competing Visions of Landscapes

1. Introduction

To simply mention national parks to most Americans is to immediately evoke images of spectacular scenery, abundant wildlife, and remote, uninhabited landscapes. The national park model also enjoys tremendous support, both domestically and internationally, as a preeminent form of natural resource protection. Along with abundant opportunities for recreation, parks protect vast tracts of land from development and environmental degradation, preserving the ecological health and visual aesthetic of landscapes for future generations. The parks’ significant value and popularity among the American public for the environmental, cultural, and spiritual benefits they provide is well-documented (Rettie, 1995; Harmon and Putney, 2003).

Many of the national parks in the western United States also contain lands which were once inhabited or seasonally used by a number of different American Indian tribes before these areas were designated as parks (Keller and Turek, 1999). Far less well-known are the values these landscapes hold for these peoples today, particularly as the character of Native relationships with these landscapes has been dramatically and often forcibly altered. For Native peoples, these landscapes still fulfill distinct material, cultural and spiritual needs. The fulfillment of these needs, however, may suggest to some a use and habitation of the landscape which conflicts with traditional ideas about national parks. These competing notions over the purpose and use of park landscapes play a primary role in the often contentious nature of relationships between tribes and national parks.
Glacier National Park contains a landscape of great significance to the Blackfeet Indians. Blackfeet relationships with this landscape are based on an extensive historical legacy, and many important aspects of Blackfeet cultural identity and spirituality are intimately associated with specific sites within the park landscape. The landscape also contains important medicinal and sacred plants and minerals, and was historically a vital resource for many Blackfeet subsistence needs. Most of these subsistence uses are prohibited by park policies or discouraged by other characteristics of the national park. The disruption of Blackfeet relationships with the park landscape has adversely affected tribal well-being, and shaped Blackfeet relationships with the national park.

Blackfeet relationships with the national park are also heavily influenced by a much larger historical context and experience with the federal government. Blackfeet characterize this experience as a systematic dispossession of land and culture by the federal government, and many view the national park as a poignant reminder and symbol of this larger dispossession. Conflict between the tribe and the park has most vividly manifested in Blackfeet legal challenges to park restrictions of subsistence use of the park’s natural resources. While these challenges may appear to be primarily concerns over material values, they also involve issues of cultural identity, tribal sovereignty, and the ability for the Blackfeet to maintain their unique historical and cultural relationship with the park landscape. Nor are these challenges strictly over material needs, as these practices often serve a variety of cultural and spiritual needs as well. Relationships between tribes and national parks are therefore shaped by the complex interplay between landscape meaning, cultural identity, restricted practices, political struggle, and historical loss.
The goal of this thesis is to investigate these different dimensions of Blackfeet relationships with the park landscape and the national park institution. Through an improved understanding of how these dimensions interact, and thus, of the relationships themselves, sources of both conflict and cooperation between the tribe and the park may be more readily identified. My primary goal is to improve relations between the two groups through an improved understanding of Blackfeet perspectives of the park, and the landscape which it protects.

This chapter begins this investigation by describing in greater detail the concept of landscapes, and the fundamentally different ways the tribe and the park service perceive the natural resources protected by the national park. Landscapes are more than simply the land and raw materials which comprise the natural environment; they are also “the symbolic environments created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment, [and] of giving the environment definition and form from a particular angle of vision and through a special filter of values and beliefs” (Greider and Garkovich, 1994, p. 1). Landscapes reflect human history, hopes, and dreams, while reflecting social values and culturally normative visions of our relationships with the natural world and with each other (Walker and Fortmann, 2003).

In national parks, the heavy emphasis on recreation often creates a particular ‘view’ of the landscape in which park visitors may imagine the activities of hiking, climbing, and swimming, even as they scan the mountains and lakes in the distance. For American Indians, a host of distinctly different activities, culturally and socially prescribed, may emerge and shape their views as they scan an identical landscape. Cultural and social identities are also embedded in landscapes, reflecting “what people in cultural groups
define to be proper and improper relationships among themselves and between themselves and the physical environment” (Greider and Garkovich, 1994, p. 2). To consider national park landscapes both as biophysical entities and as symbolic landscapes helps to identify the diverse relationships held by different people toward these significant places. Understanding parks as landscapes also places conflicts between tribes and parks within not only historical, political, and livelihood contexts, but within a cultural context as well.

2. Visions of the Glacier Landscape

The east side of Glacier National Park lies at an ecological crossroads in northwest Montana between the vast, short-grass prairie to the east, and the thick forests and mountains to the west. The physical landscape is a collision of tectonic plates; an eruption of tall peaks rising from the basins of glacially-carved valleys to run like a spine along the land for as far as the eye can see. This collision of plates also created a variety of natural environments, with several distinct ecosystems converging within the one-million acre space of the national park. Political boundaries also collide along this landscape with national borders, county lines, tribal borders, and agency jurisdictions, all converging both physically and ideologically. Cultures also collide here; the landscape is filled with the history of such encounters, beginning with the first contacts between white traders and indigenous peoples in the area, and continuing into the present day between the park and the tribe.

When the first white traders entered this area over 200 years ago, they encountered bands of a group of people who called themselves the Nitsitapii, or the Real People. The
Nitsitapii controlled a vast territory stretching as far north as the Saskatchewan River, and south to the source of the Missouri River (Jackson, 2000). Archaeological, genetic, and linguistic evidence suggests that that these people have inhabited this region for thousands of years (Goddard, 1994; Reeves and Peacock, 2001). The Nitsitapii still inhabit a small piece of this area, but now no longer follow the movement of the buffalo or the change of seasons to different encampments. Instead, they inhabit reservations far smaller in size and consequently, far less rich in natural resources, than this historical territory. The most populous band of the Nitsitapii, called the Piikáni, or Piegan, now reside on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, adjacent to Glacier National Park. The Siksiká, or Blackfoot, and Kainaa, or Blood bands both reside on reservations just north in Canada. The Nitsitapii’s historic population may have hovered near 15,000 prior to first contact with Anglo traders (Reeves and Peacock, 2001). After significant losses to disease and starvation lowered their population to only a few thousand in the late 19th century, they have since rebounded to more than 16,000 today, with about half of that population living in the United States (Robinson, n.d.).

The Piikáni band also refer to themselves as Blackfeet, and this name is how these people have been commonly known by others (see Appendix 1, for notes on names). The Blackfeet Reservation lies at this ecological, political, and cultural crossroads, at the foot of this mountainous spine which the Blackfeet call Mistakis, or The Backbone of the World. This specific area of the Northern Rocky Mountains has other, more widely known names, including the Crown of the Continent, and Glacier National Park. Despite occupying the same place, Mistakis and Glacier National Park are two very different landscapes full of distinctly different meanings, symbols, and traditions.
Landscape as Mistakis

The Blackfeet relationship with Mistakis extends back into the dawn of their collective memory. The peaks were sought as sacred sites where individuals performed lengthy fasts to receive gifts of knowledge and power. Blackfeet used the valleys to gather berries, roots, and plants for subsistence, medicinal, and ceremonial purposes. They hunted wild game for both subsistence and cultural purposes, finding animals in the mountains that could not be found on the plains (Reeves and Peacock, 2001). These various practices embodied a particular relationship with the land that had been sustained from the time of the ancestors. Blackfeet oral history contains many stories situated at specific sites within Mistakis. These accounts helped describe and preserve the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the ancestors. Stories served to illustrate the moral and ethical worldview of the Nitsitapii; these lessons becoming housed within the landscape itself (e.g. Schultz and Donaldson, 1930; McClintock, 1992).

This description of Blackfeet relationships with the landscape is not just historic, for many of these practices continue today. Glacier National Park’s designation in 1910, however, dramatically altered the Blackfeet relationship with Mistakis. While the creation of Glacier helped strengthen the nascent national park movement, it also served to compound a growing history of negative impacts to Blackfeet material, cultural, and spiritual well-being. Blackfeet history since the appearance of white settlers became marked by dramatic and often devastating changes to what had been a well-established way of life. Their land base shrank through a series of land cessions following the Lame Bull Treaty of 1855. Smallpox epidemics, military skirmishes, and the extermination of the buffalo to the trade in hides, all contributed to a drastic population loss. This last
event, which occurred in 1883, had arguably the most dramatic impact on the Blackfeet, as it led immediately to a series of starvation winters which compelled the tribe to sell more land for basic subsistence. In 1888, they sold all their land east of Cut Bank Creek, including the sacred Sweetgrass Hills, followed shortly thereafter by the 1895 Land Agreement sale of the Ceded Strip—the land that would largely become the east side of Glacier National Park. Despite retaining the rights to hunt, fish, and gather wood in the terms of the sale, these rights were stripped from the Blackfeet in 1910 with the designation of the park.

While the use of the Glacier landscape by the Blackfeet has never been eliminated completely, the presence of the national park has significantly hindered Blackfeet historical uses and practices within Mistakis. The effect this has had on the material and cultural lives of the Blackfeet is not widely known by the National Park Service (NPS), Glacier’s millions of visitors, or Montana’s predominantly non-Indian residents. The passage of time, the birth of new generations, and processes of acculturation, all have perhaps served to shroud the effects of this dispossession even from many of the Blackfeet themselves.

Blackfeet concerns over the cultural and economic future of the tribe are invariably linked to both the landscape as Mistakis and as Glacier National Park. The health and vitality of a distinctly Blackfeet culture and identity remains significantly tied to the Glacier landscape. And while the potential economic benefits of the national park remain largely unrealized by those living on the poverty-stricken reservation, many Blackfeet still look to the park as a key to improving their economic livelihoods. As the Blackfeet
believe they have always inhabited this land and always will, a future in which this landscape does not play a significant role in Blackfeet lives is unimaginable.

**Landscape as National Park**

An alternative vision of the Glacier landscape as a national park embodies mythic qualities of a similarly powerful, yet qualitatively different sort from the Blackfeet vision. America’s national parks were originally conceived as places for restorative and therapeutic recreation, as well as monuments to national pride. The spectacle of the parks’ towering peaks, pristine lakes, and abundant wildlife, contributed to the young nation’s belief in its strength and own glorious destiny. As parks were created for the benefit of the American people, they also symbolized the democratic ideals espoused by the nation’s founders. To visit the national parks and to heed the call to “see America first,” was not simply a recreational choice, but an act of patriotism (Ross-Bryant, 2005, p. 47)

The spectacular beauty of these landscapes and the remoteness of their locations embodied wild nature: a primordial, natural state pre-dating the industrial domination of landscapes back East (Runte, 1997). These supposedly pristine landscapes were envisioned as cathedrals fit for spiritual communion with the divine through their natural perfection. Their aesthetic appeal was highlighted through the deliberate design and placement of buildings and roads to emphasize scenic views (Carr, 1998). Their divine nature was sanctified through the works of authors and painters. The development of these landscapes as parks and their access by railroad was, in itself, evidence of America’s technological strength (Ross-Bryant, 2005). National parks housed a vision of
landscapes which were at once aesthetically sublime, divinely inspired, and symbols of national power.

Arriving as immigrants to a land far more vast and undeveloped than anything known in Europe, the American experience and identity was largely forged in its encounter with nature (Grusin, 2004). As such, the national parks and their landscapes reflect a particular cultural representation of the natural world arising from this history. To visit a national park is to share in a complex national heritage embodied within the unique natural features, historic lodges, and customs found within. The visitor experience is further enhanced through the various recreational activities provided across the parks, ensuring the means to further interact with not only the landscape, but all that it represents as well.

An improved understanding and appreciation for the ecological value of national parks characterized a shift in management to combine this dominant emphasis on recreation with a concern for the environmental health of the landscape. Current management of parks is often characterized by a tension between these two, sometimes conflicting concerns (Sellars, 1997). This is perhaps most obvious with Let-it-Burn policies which ‘scar’ the landscape and diminish recreation opportunities, but which also allow for the healthy regeneration of forests. This concern with natural ecosystems also frames national park policy in opposition to former park practices of stocking fish and eliminating the natural predators of more ‘desirable’ wildlife such as deer and elk. Recreation opportunities and human activities within parks are also constrained based on the extent of their disturbance of the natural character of an area. That which is considered ‘natural’ or an ‘acceptable’ disturbance is often shaped by the complex
interplay of ecological science, historical tradition, political relationships, and cultural understanding.

The national park ideals which arise from this interplay govern and shape human relationships with park environments through management policies which prohibit certain activities while promoting others. An infrastructure of trails, roads, hotels, restaurants, and other amenities, prescribes a particular range of experiences for park visitors. Park landscapes, wildlife, and history are interpreted and represented in park literature, roadside exhibits, and park museums. All of these serve to promote a particular understanding and vision of the natural world, as well as the role that national parks play in protecting that world. This vision of park landscapes, while embraced by millions of park visitors, is not necessarily shared by those Native peoples with extensive historical, cultural, and material ties to these same landscapes. These peoples often maintain their own idealized visions of the natural world and of the proper human relationships with that world.

A Contested Landscape

The vision of national parks as pristine natural areas unaffected by human hands was rarely a reality in the landscapes targeted as parks (Cronon, 1995; Spence, 1999). Many of these areas had been seasonally or permanently inhabited and used by Native peoples for generations, as had the mountains and valleys of Glacier National Park. The presence of Indians naturally upset the notion of what were supposed to be ‘uninhabited’ landscapes, and the removal of these peoples and their practices from park landscapes served to create ‘natural’ landscapes fit for designation as national parks (Cronon, 1995;
Spence, 1999). The establishment of nearly all of the national parks throughout the American West entailed some form of Indian removal. Other parks tolerated a Native presence, but generally only as a tourist curiosity lending authenticity to the park visitor’s ‘frontier’ experience (Keller and Turek, 1998). This has occurred to some extent in Glacier, where the Blackfeet have historically played a limited role in tourist presentations.

Despite the Blackfeet’s affiliation with Glacier’s symbolism, the relationship between the tribe and the park has been a largely contentious one. This relationship has been punctuated by the periodic attempts of tribal members to legally regain subsistence rights explicitly retained by Blackfeet leaders in the terms of the 1895 Land Agreement. Subsequent legal interpretations of this agreement supported the government’s elimination of these rights. Blackfeet challenges over these subsistence rights have evolved into a modern context, with some now claiming rights to graze cattle within the park boundary, and rights to business opportunities within the park which are currently restricted to a few government-contracted concessionaires (Presti, 2005).

While these struggles may appear to primarily reflect Blackfeet concerns over tribal rights to economic and subsistence opportunity, they also reflect a deeper conflict over the essential character of the Glacier landscape. Viewed as Mistakis, the landscape has long provided for the Blackfeet people, both materially and culturally. To restrict Blackfeet use of the Glacier landscape and the fulfillment of these needs is to deny the validity of this heritage. Viewed as a national park, the landscape is a symbol of preservation and restraint, and to allow Native subsistence use appears to conflict with the essence of this mandate. Each perspective dictates what is considered a proper and
improper relationship with the Glacier landscape; each dictates one set of values and material uses over another.

The conflict between the Blackfeet people and Glacier National Park is part of a larger pattern of conflict between American Indian tribes and national parks. While each situation reflects a unique geographical and historical relationship between park and people, along with a host of diverse social, economic, and political variables, there remains at heart the basic alienation of tribes from landscapes significant to their well-being. Tribal claims to national park landscapes which are framed within material, commodity-based terms also overlook the cultural and spiritual significance tribes often associate with these landscapes. At a more fundamental level, struggles between tribes and parks often reflect basic cultural differences in their understanding of the natural world and of human relationships with that world.

Modern American Indian relationships with the land have often evolved from deeply rooted traditions and historical uses tied to specific places. While it is impossible to generalize among the diversity of tribes, a prominent holism often exists between place, land-use practice, and cultural identity, which is not easily severed. Land-use restrictions characteristic of national park policy therefore often negatively impact cultural identity and knowledge. The diverse and significant values related to Native practices lend insight into the longevity and perseverance of American Indian claims to access park landscapes. While the strength of these voices waxes and wanes, it still resides many years later in the hearts and minds of these peoples. As Glacier National Park approaches its centennial anniversary, stories of a homeland dispossessed and the loss to traditional ways are still being told in Blackfeet homes today.
3. The Importance of Protected Area Research

The role protected areas play in shaping and governing human relationships with the environment is obviously a significant one. The physical infrastructure, policies, and traditions of parks, all suggest a particular kind of engagement with the natural world. This philosophy of relating to nature is reified on a grand scale through the proliferation of parks, and is sustained through their popularity with the public. While this conceptualization of the park experience has served to introduce many to the natural world who may have otherwise remained strangers, and has inspired countless individuals to support environmental protection in its various forms, the human relationship with the environment it promotes has proved to be detrimental to American Indian peoples.

For American Indian tribes whose relationships with specific park landscapes are integral to cultural and spiritual well-being, prohibitions to the material use of park landscapes characteristic of park policy may lead to significant negative social and cultural effects. Material relationships are often inseparable from cultural ones, with detrimental effects manifesting both overtly in social dysfunction, and covertly through cultural erosion. Research which aims to provide an improved understanding of American Indian relationships with ancestral lands within parks, and the effect that parks have on these relationships with the land, may help inform approaches to the management of national parks that better accommodate the needs and concerns of tribes (McAvoy et al., 2003).

The NPS has acknowledged the need to consider indigenous perspectives and their often significant cultural and material ties to the lands under its jurisdiction (Howell,
Naturally, an improved understanding of these alternative perspectives may also identify both the sources of contention between tribes and parks, as well as similarities in goals and desires. The NPS has defined “cultural landscapes” as landscapes not only identified with historic events or ecologically shaped by human activities and occupancy, but also ethnographic landscapes “containing a variety of natural and cultural resources that associated people define as heritage resources” (Alanen et al., 2000, p. 8). These authors liken these ethnographic landscapes of the NPS to the “associative cultural landscapes” of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, defined as “landscape[s] that reflect powerful religious, artistic, or cultural associations of natural elements rather than material cultural evidence, which may be insignificant or even absent” (pp. 8-9). Both organizations emphasize the importance of preserving these “continuing” or “living” landscapes.

The NPS call for the consideration of these living landscapes is articulated in 1988 policy concerns which state:

Certain contemporary Native American and other communities are permitted by law, regulation, or policy to pursue customary religious, subsistence, and other cultural uses of park resources with which they are traditionally associated. Such continuing use is often essential to the survival of family, community, or regional cultural systems, including patterns of belief and economic and religious life…The National Park Service will conduct appropriate cultural anthropological research in coordination with park-associated groups. The purposes of this research will be to meet management needs for information about such groups; to develop inventories of traditional ethnographic resources associated with them; to determine the effects of their traditional ceremonial and consumptive uses of park resources; to evaluate the factors guiding their traditional systems for managing natural resources and creating cultural properties; to define their traditional and contemporary relationships to these resources; and to assess the effects of NPS activities on these groups. Research findings will be used to support planning, resource management decisions, and activities; to develop interpretive programs accurately reflecting native American and other cultures; and to facilitate consultation with management responsibilities to park-associated communities (NPS, 1988, as cited in Howell, 1994).
Significant organizational and philosophical barriers within the park service, however, have made the integration of this cultural conservation directive difficult (Howell, 1994). These barriers include a tendency to manage resources as either cultural or natural, and a “preservationist ethic” that has “led the Park Service to separate nature from culture and to value historical over contemporary cultural expressions” (p. 11). The most current “State of the Park” report for Glacier indicates a need to rewrite the human history of the area and to strive for improved cooperation and collaboration with local tribes (NPCA, 2002). While an extensive ethnography (Reeves and Peacock, 2001) was compiled identifying significant plant, animal, mineral, and other cultural resources within the Glacier landscape, there still remains a significant gap in understanding Blackfeet relationships with the national park, and how these have affected the traditional relationships described in the ethnography. Improved cooperation between parks and local tribes requires understanding contemporary relationships and views in addition to historical ones. It is promising that this current gap in understanding is acknowledged in the national park literature.

**Current Research**

The existing literature on indigenous groups and national parks is largely focused on situations in the developing world, with a wide documentation of cases from Africa and Asia. Studies from the West, however, and from the United States in particular, are remarkably slim. This is quite ironic given that the national park model was developed in the United States, and that American Indians were the first indigenous groups to be regularly affected by the designation of national parks.
The protected area literature is characterized by a rather polarized debate between those who advocate a “fortress-style” approach to ecological protection, and those who seek more inclusive models which also address the needs of local populations. Those in favor of strict protection argue that integrating the needs of local communities into conservation strategies invariably undermines species protection and is largely incompatible with conservation goals (see Terborgh, 1991; Oates, 1991). These authors argue that without strict protection, the rapid, irreparable loss of species to extinction cannot be curbed. Proponents advocate a national park model derived from the United States, in which human habitation and natural resource use is generally prohibited. While the similarity of goals between national parks in the US and the developing world do overlap in their concern with ecosystem health, the purpose of American parks as places also concerned with recreation, aesthetic preservation, and nationalism, bears less resemblance to parks in the developing world, where biodiversity protection is a primary goal (Wilshusen et al., 2002).

This reality is implicit in arguments which claim the ‘Yellowstone’ model is generally inappropriate in the developing world where targeted landscapes are usually already inhabited and integrated into the lives of local communities. These arguments claim that this approach to conservation often provokes conflict, breeds resistance, and damages the legitimacy of both conservation goals and parks themselves (Chapin, 2004). Restrictions on livelihood activities within parks can also deepen poverty in communities already struggling with subsistence and economic concerns. Because problems arising from conservation strategies are inevitably embedded in social contexts, they require solutions which are not only socially and politically feasible, but which are morally just
as well (Wilshusen et al., 2002). This conclusion appears sound on both pragmatic and ethical grounds, for conservation strategies which do not account for both social contexts and material needs have a long history of failure (Brechin et al., 2002), and the widely documented troubles of former resident peoples displaced by the establishment of parks raise morally challenging questions (West and Brechin, 1991).

The dilemmas posed by US national parks on indigenous populations have received far less analysis. Existing studies are generally concerned with historical investigations of the relationships between national parks and tribes, rather than social science investigations of their contemporary relationships (e.g. Keller and Turek, 1998; Spence, 1999; Burnham, 2000). The negative social and cultural effects of parks on American Indian tribes are immediately evident within these works; however, these effects are not systematically investigated within the context of a single park and tribe. While the US national parks and other federally-managed landscapes have served as locations for numerous social science studies, these typically focus on visitor relationships rather than on those people who consider these areas as homelands and rely on them for nutritional, spiritual, and cultural needs (Watson et al., 2003).

A few studies do address the range and variety of relationships that indigenous peoples hold towards traditional lands now managed as protected areas. In his study of an Alaskan indigenous group in the western Arctic, Whiting (2004) discovered that many individuals viewed specific management actions as beneficial to their relationship with the land. However, there still existed fundamental differences between indigenous and managerial conceptions of the appropriate relationships that people had with land managed as ‘wilderness.’ While this distinction had no appreciable effect on indigenous
relationships with the land, the concept of wilderness influenced park management of the land in particular ways that were often adversarial to indigenous relationships. These differences in cultural understanding over the appropriate use of wilderness often contributed to an underlying tension and animosity within the indigenous population towards the park and its managers.

A study of tribal members’ relationships with the Mission Mountains Tribal Wilderness on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana showed heavy emphasis on the cultural and spiritual importance of the area, contrasting a non-tribal tendency to highlight recreational relationships (Watson et al., in press). This study also showed that the physical use of an area is, in and of itself, an insufficient indicator of the full range of relationships and values that people have with particular landscapes. It also emphasized the importance of understanding the diversity of relationships held by different groups towards a particular area. Land managers are thus provided a crucial component towards developing more socially equitable and locally legitimate management solutions.

There have been a few studies concerned with the relationship between the Blackfeet and Glacier National Park, and they have all served to inform this research. Ashby (1985) provides the first scholarly examination of the Land Agreement of 1895 through an archival study of the events surrounding the land sale, the Blackfeet retention of subsistence rights, and the subsequent legal battles over their loss. Kipp (2002) examined the Blackfeet oral history of the 1895 Agreement and the controversy surrounding the current location of the park boundary. Presti (2005) focused on the subsistence rights of the 1895 Agreement, framing them in both a historical and
contemporary context, and documenting the widely held belief on the reservation that these rights were never lost despite legal decisions to the contrary.

Reeves and Peacock’s ethnography, “Our Mountains are our Pillows” (2001), focused specifically on the knowledge of Blackfeet elders in describing traditional Blackfeet uses of important plants, animals, and minerals found within the boundary of the national park. The authors also provide a detailed history of the Blackfeet presence in the area, along with information on Blackfeet cosmology, and the cultural significance of different places within the park landscape. These studies all provide important contributions toward a more complete understanding of the relationship between the park and the tribe, and will be more thoroughly examined within those sections of this thesis where the information they provide is most relevant.

4. Research Goals and Thesis Organization

This research is primarily concerned with understanding Blackfeet relationships with the Glacier park landscape and institution, while providing insight into the nature of conflict between the tribe and the park. To provide clarity in describing these relationships, I will use the term ‘parkland’ to refer to the land and its waters within the Glacier National Park boundary, and I will use the term ‘park’ to refer to the protected area institution itself. The ‘park’ therefore includes, park infrastructure, personnel, regulations, directives, and related historic and symbolic significance.

This research is different from previous studies in that it examines contemporary Blackfeet relationships with Glacier in the context of social theory. This is done in order to better understand the various forces shaping and influencing these relationships. The
research goal is as concerned with understanding the ‘process’ of these relationships as it is with understanding their quality and character. Examining these relationships naturally suggests solutions to addressing the tension which exists between the tribe and the park. Solutions are offered by the research analysis as well as by the participants themselves. At a minimum, this thesis seeks to lend voice to the region’s oldest, yet most marginalized inhabitants.

It also seeks to inform park management and staff of the variety of viewpoints and relationships held by the Blackfeet. Indeed, one of the chief complaints by many Blackfeet is the frequent change of personnel, particularly among seasonal rangers (Burnham, 2000). The nature of advancement within the National Park Service often requires frequent movement throughout the entire park system, as vacancies appear. This naturally results in a managerial staff with administrative expertise, but a generally superficial understanding of the character, quality, and depth of local relationships with parklands.

These Blackfeet relationships are described through the narratives of research participants, which also describe a deeper story of cultural history and tradition, conflict and struggle with the park, and the significance of the parkland in the lives of the Blackfeet. While much of what is described here is familiar to the Blackfeet themselves, the nuances and subtleties described through analysis, particularly analysis by an outsider, may hopefully prove interesting and informative to Blackfeet readers as well.

This thesis is organized to present a logical progression of themes and ideas, building a foundation from which Blackfeet relationships with the park and parkland may be better understood. Chapter Two describes the conceptual framework which
theoretically informs this research, focusing particularly on how this framework shapes an understanding of Blackfeet narratives of the parkland. Chapter Three then presents the qualitative methodology which guided data collection and analysis, along with other important aspects of the research process itself.

Blackfeet relationships with the park are heavily shaped by their relationships with the parkland, and these are described in Chapter Four. The Blackfeet historical narrative provides an alternative interpretation of the events surrounding the establishment of the park, and embeds the park within a larger historical context. This narrative is examined in Chapter Five. Having established these two primary fields of influence, Blackfeet relationships with the national park institution are examined in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven provides final thoughts and analysis on the nature of cultural landscapes managed by the NPS, on conflict between tribes and parks, and directions for the future.
Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

1. Introduction

This chapter will describe in greater detail some of the concepts already introduced, as well as the larger theoretical framework which informs and organizes the analysis of this thesis. As previously noted, conflict between tribes and parks, while frequently manifesting as struggles over material resources and thus appearing solely concerned with economic and subsistence issues, are also often concerned with cultural and spiritual issues as well. This integration of tangible and intangible values within Native practices is one significant aspect of Blackfeet relationships with the parkland which may remain overlooked when examined from Western perspectives. While economic and subsistence needs certainly play influential roles in how a landscape may be perceived and used, cultural meanings and values also significantly shape landscape perception and use as well.

Conflicts between tribes and parks are thus significantly shaped by basic cultural differences in the conceptualization of the human relationship with the natural world. While struggles over material needs, political power, and the interpretation of history also play significant roles in shaping conflict, cultural understanding invariably frames and interprets these dimensions as well. The often striking cultural differences between Western and indigenous perspectives described below suggest great potential for misunderstanding. This is especially true when either side considers the other’s perspectives, meanings, and values, from its own set of cultural assumptions and understandings.
The narrative is introduced below as a conceptual tool for understanding Blackfeet relationships with the park and parkland. Narratives are built around the fundamental cultural assumptions and understandings of their narrators, and so depict perspectives from within their own culturally normative frameworks. Blackfeet narratives not only describe their relationships with the park and the parkland, but also lend insight into the cultural framework from which these narratives are produced.

Blackfeet narratives are shaped by five primary thematic dimensions. Theoretical perspectives lend insight into how these different dimensions shape and influence Blackfeet relationships, as well as how they relate to and influence each other. The dimensions described below are meanings, identity, land-use practices, political struggle, and history.

In Blackfeet narratives about the parkland for example, narratives describe the meanings people attach to a landscape; the ways in which they identify with a landscape; and the ways in which they use a landscape, as well as how these uses strengthen meaning and identity. Political struggles over landscape access and representation also shape narratives, as do the history of material and cultural relationships between the Blackfeet and the landscape. All of these dimensions play roles in shaping and influencing the other, such that examining these dimensions in isolation does not fully describe the nature of Blackfeet relationships with the park or parkland. Narratives therefore offer a broader perspective from which to examine these dimensions, how they interact, and how they shape the nature of Blackfeet relationships.
2. The Social Construction of Nature

Our ideas about the natural environment are significantly shaped, or ‘constructed’ by various cultural and social values, meanings, and beliefs. Relationships with the natural world comprise a complex interplay between these intangible meanings and the material practices which they promote. Practices may strengthen or alter meanings, transform political or economic relationships, or even change the physical character of the natural world itself. How we conceptualize these changes are again mediated by our social constructions of them, which may themselves have been transformed as well.

The social construction of nature does not indicate the lack of a tangible, biophysical reality, but rather, refers to how the ways that people perceive and know a landscape are framed through personal experience and cultural understanding. The physical environment is transformed into a ‘landscape’ filled with the cultural meanings and symbols of the people who interact with it. This philosophical position maintains that landscapes do not have inherent meaning, and that while they maintain measurable characteristics and qualities such as those catalogued within the natural sciences, the significance of these qualities, and the symbols and meanings they evoke, are still culturally derived. This implies that national park management goals strive to protect a particular character, or ‘nature,’ of the landscape, inasmuch as they strive to protect the ecological health of the land itself. While park policies promote a view of the natural world as one in which humans are fundamentally ‘outsiders,’ and in which activity must be restrained to the benefit of the land, Native American groups may conversely view their presence as beneficial and integral to the health of the land.
The diverse ways in which land is viewed and valued become immediately apparent when comparing, for example, ranchers, environmentalists, and real estate developers, and the different land-uses each group advocates (Jorgensen, 1984). While biophysical properties of a landscape may remain constant, those landscape qualities which are considered valuable, and how a landscape is used and represented, may be radically different across diverse social and cultural groups. Even the extent to which landscapes are considered ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’ may vary significantly across social groups from similar cultural backgrounds, revealing as much about the biophysical world as the lens through which it is viewed (Hull et al., 2001).

Some view a belief in the social construction of nature as drifting towards a dangerous relativism that strips the natural world of all intrinsic meaning and value apart from that which is socially ascribed, paving the way for an increased exploitation and degradation of what are merely ‘relatively natural’ environments (Soule and Lease, 1995). The epistemological sophistication of social constructivism, however, lies in its argument “that all the concepts we use to refer to biophysical nature and its attendant qualities—wilderness, wildness, biodiversity—are human concepts, and as such carry cultural, political, and other important meanings” (Proctor, 1998, p. 358). What acknowledging the social construction of nature does is remove essentialist notions about the character of nature, wilderness, and human relationships with the natural environment, from what were admittedly Western understandings and expressions of these ideas (Escobar, 1999). Rather than simply defining concepts, these meanings reveal basic understandings about what we value, what we believe; quite plainly, these concepts derive from how we conceive of ourselves and our position within the natural
environment. Acknowledging that landscapes are socially constructed helps to explain the nature of natural resource conflict, which can often be described as clashes over meaning, as much as it can be described as clashes over subsistence and economic well-being (Williams, 1995).

**Western and Indigenous Conceptualizations of Nature**

Every culture carries an “environmental imaginary,” or, “a way of imagining nature, including visions of those forms of social and individual practice which are ethically proper and morally right with regard to nature” (Peet and Watts, 1996, p. 263). In order to address those conflicts which have long existed between national parks and tribes, we must acknowledge that the management of parks is influenced by a particular understanding of the natural world. This understanding generally places culture apart from nature in a dichotomous relationship which is reflected in other mutually exclusive pairings such as that of ‘wilderness’ and ‘civilization.’ These dichotomous associations are a hallmark of Western thought, and represent a particular cultural lens through which to view reality (Brown, 1976). This particular understanding of the human relationship with the natural world shapes the management philosophies of parks, excludes particular uses over others, and frames the meaning and representation of parks to the greater public.

Nash (1973) describes this dichotomy of culture and nature as arising from the historical notion that spaces outside of human control were no longer within the province of culture, and instead belonged to the domain of nature. The dualism between humans and nature is largely a product of Judeo-Christian philosophy which explicitly places
humans within a dominant position with respect to the rest of creation (Hull, 2006). Furthering this rift was the historic notion of wilderness as a metaphoric abode of evil. While current symbols of wilderness have dramatically changed in Western contexts, wilderness has still remained largely outside of society; a place to visit rather than inhabit; an entity apart, which while thoroughly explored and mapped, remains conceptually outside of the human realm.

In the American context, the concept of wilderness has shaped conservation actions from the beginning of the conservation movement. Wilderness has evolved from a threatening place to the first European settlers, to a natural resource ripe for exploitation, into what now remain the last vestiges of a primordial, pre-human state of nature in danger of being forever lost (Manning, 1989). The evolution of this concept and its influence on the character of Western natural resource conservation methods around the world can hardly be overstated. William Cronon (1995) sees the “modern environmental movement” and its “discourse” as directly descended from the “cultural invention” of wilderness.

This dichotomy is not presented to describe the actual Western experience within nature, for such a mutually exclusive approach would suggest that humans can never know the natural world, as their very presence in that world would make it inherently ‘unnatural.’ The dichotomy is presented, rather, as a reflection of the language and ideas used when ordering our relationship with the world, which finds its way into the land management philosophy of the NPS, where park units are designated as either ‘natural’ or ‘cultural.’ For instance, Glacier is administered as a natural park while Mesa Verde is
administered as a cultural one. The difficulty of integrating cultural concerns within natural parks is largely predicated upon this philosophical divide (Howell, 1994).

While Western conceptualizations of wilderness place humans as fundamentally outside the domain of nature, indigenous cultures traditionally maintain a more holistically integrated understanding of the natural world. Within this cultural understanding, there is no “strict separation between biophysical, human, and supernatural worlds” that is characteristic of Western understandings (Escobar, 2001, p. 151). This integration of the natural world with the social and spiritual worlds suggests that forcibly severing ties to significant places or natural resources would bear social and cultural costs, as well as more material costs.

Describing cultures as ‘indigenous,’ however, is in itself problematic. Indigeneity is a fluid concept often relying as much on external perceptions of ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, as on an internal sense of these same things (Snipp, 1989). As such, the use of the term ‘indigenous’ is as much a cultural statement as it is a political one. Indigeneity has traditionally been associated with groups of people who have inhabited an area for thousands of years, maintaining distinct languages, cultural traditions, and a distinct ethnic identity (Cunningham and Stanley, 2003). Naturally, such a definition poses problems for groups who have been displaced, or who have seen significant erosion to traditional ways of life through the pressures of colonization and acculturation. Royal (2003) proposes to define indigeneity primarily as a worldview in which humans are an integrated part of the natural world, contrasting a Western tendency to view humans outside the domain of nature.
While I did not explicitly ask Blackfeet participants if they considered themselves ‘indigenous,’ a few expressed their belief that the Blackfeet had “aboriginal rights” to the natural resources of the area. This belief is based in a tribal oral history recounting a presence in the area dating back thousands of years, and in the distinct cultural tradition, language, and ethnicity of the Nitsitapii. This Blackfeet sense of a distinctly ‘indigenous’ or ‘aboriginal’ relationship with the land, as opposed to a non-indigenous relationship, is perhaps best captured by Buggey’s (1999) definition of an “Aboriginal cultural landscape,” as:

…a place valued by an Aboriginal group (or groups) because of their long and complex relationship with that land. [The landscape] expresses their unity with the natural and spiritual environment. It embodies their traditional knowledge of spirits, places, land uses, and ecology. Material remains of the association may be prominent, but will often be minimal or absent.

To lend greater insight into the nature of this type of landscape and its cultural and material expression among indigenous groups, some primary characteristics of indigenous relationships with land are outlined below. The customs and traditions of indigenous peoples, like any people, continue to evolve over time. It is important not to assume that indigenous practices are static and frozen within history. Native cultural ideals are continually played out within a modern context, and these traditional themes play a formative role in modern manifestations of culture and relationships with the land (Ross, 1992). This suggests that a more detailed understanding of traditional indigenous relationships with the land may help provide an understanding of their contemporary relationships.
Indigenous Relationships with Land

A review of the literature reveals a few common characteristics of traditional indigenous relationships with land. While it is difficult and problematic to generalize across and within cultural contexts, McAvoy (2002, p. 386) states that “noted Indian scholars (Brown, 1976; Toelken, 1976) hold that there are pan-Indian characteristics or positions that are quite pervasive across tribal groups, although they may be expressed in diverse ways.”

Rather than serving as strict definitions, descriptions of these characteristics serve to impart an awareness of the roles they play in indigenous worldviews. These descriptions are lenses through which Westerners may view indigenous relationships with the land in concepts similar to their own. Obviously there are nuances lost in the translation of concepts across cultures, and isolating these characteristics is admittedly antithetical to the holistic nature of their occurrence in indigenous worldviews. This approach, however, is an effective means of highlighting differences between indigenous and Western views.

A primary cultural characteristic of Indian tribes throughout the American West is the dominant role of place. Tribal landscapes are populated with distinct locations of cultural, spiritual, and material significance (Basso, 1996). Places become intimately associated with distinct meanings and symbols, and play fundamental roles in the lives and worldviews of the Native people who associate with them. This primacy of place is fundamentally different from Western traditions (Burton, 2002). For example, while Western religions are essentially ‘portable,’ in that they may be practiced theoretically anywhere, American Indian ritual and sacred practices are commonly linked to specific
geographic sites that cannot be substituted by other locales (Gordon-McCutchan, 1990). Specific geographic locations are also the places of cultural stories and myths, and serve as repositories of cultural and spiritual meaning. A group’s collective intimacy with specific places, combined with a long historical tie to an area, infuses these particular places with extreme significance and value (Gallagher, 1993).

This close association and familiarity with an area also informs indigenous approaches to land management. Through generations of close observation and living in intimate relation to the land, indigenous groups typically develop systems of land use that work within existing ecological processes, complementing and channeling them in order to provide necessary subsistence (Berkes et al., 2000). Natcher et al. (2004) even take issue with the term “management” as misrepresenting the relationship that indigenous groups have with their environment. The authors characterize indigenous relationships with the land as being largely derived from shared cultural norms, behaviors, and their associated meanings and values, rather than from technical models of land management which ignore these cultural facets. From this perspective, land management appears more as a social engagement with the land, rather than the impassive manipulation and control of natural elements.

Resource restrictions, or “conservation methods,” within indigenous cultures are traditionally influenced by a combination of ecological, social, and religious factors (Colding and Folke, 2001). In fact, Alcorn (1993, p. 425) claims there is no direct translation of the word “conservation” in any non-European language. Instead, the concept may be best described as “doing things right,” or “respecting Nature,” and is not an activity separate from the rest of one’s life. This is not to suggest that all indigenes are
natural conservationists practicing sustainable land use and “respecting Nature,” but rather, to illustrate a different approach to conservation from dominant, Western understandings.

This alternative approach to land-use is also evident within indigenous conceptions of property. Rather than a rigid, codified understanding of private property common to Western approaches, indigenous ownership is a more fluid and customary understanding (Berkes, 1996). Alcorn (1993, p. 426) characterizes traditional indigenous property regimes as “partnerships between individuals and their community.” These regimes feature overlapping resource rights that share benefits across the community, while simultaneously excluding outsiders.

The traditional Blackfeet concept of property also considered food and other natural resources as open to all within the community, and that once labor had been expended to hunt or gather these things, they became personal property. This understanding was tempered by cultural requirements which expected those who were able to provide food and other necessities to those who were not (McFee, 1972). Property thus has a distinctly communal flavor, both in the manner in which it was obtained and in the social rules attached to its use and distribution. This understanding is inextricably bound and governed by cultural rules of reciprocity, a notion that affects indigenous relationships within a community, as well as with the land itself.

The predominant role of reciprocity in indigenous relationships is arguably grounded in the cultural understanding that everything is interconnected, and reciprocal actions and gestures are a crucial means of maintaining a balance, both in the cultural and environmental realms (Schieffelin, 1980). A concern with reciprocity commonly appears
among many indigenous cultures around the world (Peterson, 2000; Kawamura, 2004), especially within cultures that are essentially hunter-gatherer rather than agriculturalist (Lee, 2006).

In his ethnography of the Blackfeet, McFee (1972) identified reciprocity as an integral aspect of social and spiritual life. As a primary means of garnering approval and respect within social contexts, acts of generosity are reciprocated with a sort of symbolic social capital that confers respect and authority on an individual (Kawamura, 2004). In a similar way, offerings to the land and the beings which inhabit it are made to maintain appropriate and favorable relationships, which then ensure future benefits both individually and communally (Reeves and Peacock, 2001). Reciprocal offerings to the land are activities of critical importance to Native peoples who consider land as a “sentient, living being” (Brady, 1999).

Another primary characteristic of indigenous relationships with the land is the holistic function of most indigenous activities. To claim that particular land-use practices serve primarily economic, subsistence, cultural, or material functions distorts their role and purpose within indigenous lives. For instance, hunting serves not only subsistence needs within indigenous communities, but plays a vital cultural and often spiritual role as well (McCorquodale, 1997). Certainly, this may be the case in Western cultural contexts as well, particularly where hunting is viewed as both a source of food and as a recreation activity. The difference though, is that these activities are often viewed as a diversion, or an act apart from ‘normal’ life. Indigenous worldviews do not typically segregate activities or the places where they occur into specific contexts. A holistic perspective emphasizes one context in which all activities, relationships, and locales form an
interdependent whole (Cornell, 1990). Humans are perceived as living in coexistence
with the land rather than as periodically apart from it, then reestablishing contact through
recreation, meditation, and other activities within the natural environment.

These characteristics shape and influence the nature of indigenous relationships with
“Aboriginal cultural landscapes.” As these landscapes are often under the jurisdiction of
federal land management agencies, the relationships held by indigenous groups toward
these lands have also become highly politicized. Cultural meanings and understandings
of these landscapes have often been shaped by struggles over access to these places and
to their representation. To better understand the relationships held by the Blackfeet
toward the Glacier landscape, I propose an examination of park and parkland
relationships as a form of narrative. In this way, the researcher remains attuned to both
the cultural and political elements within descriptions of these relationships. The concept
of narrative allows for a holistic examination of the various elements shaping Blackfeet
relationships with the Glacier landscape.

3. The Narrative

Narratives are more than simply stories told to entertain and inform. At a more
fundamental level, they “mediate between self and the world, offering description,
 explanation, and insight about the world and/or [sic] that person’s experiences of it over
time” (Robertson et al., 2000, p. 121). Robertson et al. (2000) define “environmental
narratives” as the “stories that are bounded by the narrator’s particular experiences,
observations, and attachment to place,” presented through a “diversity of media including
film, paint, print, and speech” (p. 120). Narratives manifest in a variety of ways and at a
variety of scales (Campbell, 2007). They fuel legal challenges and disputes over resource management, and also contribute to “the choice of management strategies and their justification” (Peluso, 1993, p. 136).

The dominance of one particular vision of a landscape over another relies on the power of groups to control various aspects of human relationships with the land itself. This is most effectively realized through the control of various forms of access to the landscape. The power to control the landscape also indicates a power to privilege certain meanings over others, and to sustain them through symbolic, interpretive, and legal frameworks. Within these frameworks, the restriction and promotion of particular uses of the landscape are justified. This vision of a landscape is articulated and sustained through narratives, which frame the meanings of landscapes, political struggles over their resources, and their histories.

When used in political struggles over landscapes, narratives “have the power to frame and create understanding; to create and maintain moral communities; to validate current actions; and to empower, encourage and relieve their tellers” (Fortmann, 1995, p. 1054). Narratives thus define the nature of political conflict, and embed conflict within a particular context. These narrative interpretations serve to maintain both the strength and legitimacy of claims. Fortmann (1995) examined the use of stories by rural villagers in Zimbabwe to maintain a sense of vitality and legitimacy to their claims over property rights. Narratives served to maintain a “localized discourse” in which other aspects of the political struggle over resource access were acted out. These stories portrayed both a particular view of historical events, and a cultural identification with claims, which served to justify villager’s actions in support of those claims.
Offen (2003) examined the use of narrative by the Miskitu Indians of Nicaragua in mapping community land claims against the national government. By integrating symbols of Miskitu cultural identity with familiar topographic features of the landscape, community leaders effectively linked material struggles over land with cultural struggles over identity. Because landscapes themselves accrue symbolic meanings, physical landmarks may serve as effective touchstones for the poignant representation of complex political struggles. Narratives about landscapes may thus serve distinctly political ends by linking claims over land and resources to fundamental understandings of a landscape, in this case, to a historical understanding of Miskitu relationships between themselves and their territorial lands.

The power of narrative is evident in its ability to lend an “incontrovertible logic” to landscape use, claims, and representation, which arise from fundamental assumptions about the nature of a landscape, its history, and its social relationships. Fairhead and Leach (1996) describe how the stories told through this “logic” provide “scripts and justifications for development action” in Guinea, West Africa. The dominant government narrative describing the deforestation of this region and justifying its accompanying forestry policy, were predicated upon a particular interpretation of natural history, along with fundamental assumptions about the relationships between the rural poor and the land. Closer scrutiny revealed significant errors in all of these assumptions, resulting in an interpretation of the landscape being deforested by the poor, rather than actually being afforested by their land-use over time (Fairhead and Leach, 1996). The authors provide significant evidence that this is a regional, rather than simply local
phenomenon, revealing the discursive power of narratives to frame environmental policies at increasingly greater scales (Fairhead and Leach, 1998).

Narratives frame a particular interpretation of reality by choosing which aspects of that reality to emphasize and which to ignore. Zerner (1996) shows the discursive means by which local communities are marginalized and ignored in narratives told by conservation NGOs when framing their missions for biodiversity conservation. These stories talk about landscapes in purely culture-less terms, constructing “images of a natural environment that is separate from and fundamentally unshaped by the history of human action,” where nature is “an autonomous realm, neither materially nor socially constructed by society” (p.70). Within these narratives, conservation efforts have no negative effects on local communities because their normative vision of nature does not include people. The actual complexities of real-world conservation are deliberately muted to build support for a simple ‘pro-nature’ position free of moral dilemmas.

These pro-nature narratives are countered by indigenous organizations which highlight human dimensions within the natural world. These narratives emphasize the longevity of indigenous residence, the collective ecological knowledge gained through this extensive experience, and the fundamental cultural ties and identification these groups have with territorial landscapes (Muehlebach, 2001). These narratives explicitly counter the notion of a natural world devoid of culture and community, describing the human presence as normal and potentially beneficial to the environment. By emphasizing reciprocal, holistic relationships between people and landscapes, these narratives describe a natural world which appears to benefit from the presence of people.
Narrative discourse occurs at a variety of scales and through a variety of media. Narratives are manifest within government policy, claims to resources, invocations of identity, and stories of personal experience and collective history. Within all of these are contained “a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities” (Hajer, 1995, p.46).

Narratives naturally compete, in that they invoke alternative ‘takes’ on what is actually happening, what should happen, and why. This is not to say that narratives never find common ground; that they never agree. However, a confluence of narrative streams often emerges from fundamentally different cultural sources. While park proponents and American Indian tribes often both desire protection of significant natural resources (Stoffle et al., 1997), the sources of these desires are often very different. Efforts at cross-cultural cooperation and collaboration in natural resource management must consider not only the similarities upon which such relationships are built, but also the differences from which such similarities emerge.

4. Dimensions of the Narrative

Narratives contain a variety of distinct, yet overlapping dimensions. The theoretical framework for each dimension describes a distinct aspect of human relationships with the environment, as well as the ways in which dimensions overlap and influence each other. What results is a holistic picture in which isolating each distinct aspect of a narrative can be both problematic and misrepresentative.
As described above, narratives about landscapes often invoke the meanings of significant places to affirm cultural identity, while simultaneously supporting political struggles over claims to landscape resources. Land-use practices supported by narratives also often serve to legitimize claims, fulfill identity, and strengthen the meanings of landscapes. Historical relationships and experiences provide context, and inform and influence all of these narrative dimensions as well. While often interwoven in their contributions to and influence upon narratives, landscape meanings, cultural identity, land-use practices, political struggle, and history are examined separately below.

The Role of Place Theory in this Research

To better understand the dimensions of meaning and identity in Blackfeet narratives, I refer here to specific facets within the diverse literature on place. The concept of place has grown tremendously influential in natural resource management circles, particularly as a conceptualization of landscapes beyond what historically were purely material and commodity-based criteria (Williams et al., 1992). An emphasis on place acknowledges the non-material meanings and values that people attach to significant landscapes and their use.

While the influence of diverse academic disciplines on place is evident in the variety of research goals, differences in terminology, and lack of a dominant theoretical tradition (Patterson and Williams, 2005), there still exists a fundamental understanding of place as socially constructed space; a geographic location imbued with cultural meaning, and shaped by social and political processes (Williams, 1995). Place has been described as the nexus between the biophysical world, social processes at work in that world, and
cultural meanings which define and conceptually order that world (Relph, 1976; Sack, 1992; Cheng et al., 2003). Places are distinct locales which, like narratives, are constantly evolving, both in their composition and in their interpretation. Brandenburg and Carroll (1995) claim that what many modern place theorists are really describing are “landscapes,” or land which is transformed into a meaningful reality through the “scape,” or projection from the mind. The biophysical world is framed into “landscapes” through the perception and projection of meaning and value onto the land, and then shaped by associated material practices. I make this distinction because while I use the term ‘landscape,’ contemporary theory which informs the symbolic and meaning-filled dimensions of parkland narratives in this research comes from the literature on ‘place.’ Place theory helps to unravel the complex interplay between meaning and identity, and how these relate to and interact with other narrative dimensions.

Meanings

Place meanings play a pivotal role in how people understand and relate to a place, or landscape. As previously noted, meanings are integrated within all aspects of landscapes: from the biophysical world and how it is understood, classified, and described, to conceptually framing the social processes and institutions which shape the landscape and its associated human activities. Meanings serve as a fundamental sphere of influence shaping people’s relationships with landscapes.

Different types of place meanings and the ways in which they are assigned to a landscape, also serve to describe the nature of people’s relationships with a landscape. Williams and Patterson (1996) developed a typology for an improved understanding of
place meanings, particularly across cultural contexts. McAvoy and McDonald (2003) view this typology as “the most culturally sensitive way to examine place meaning and attachment with aboriginal peoples” (p. 94). Williams and Patterson outline four categories in which to map and interpret place meaning. The primary significance of this typology is in its deliberate movement from viewing landscapes in terms of “fulfilling human consumptive needs, and toward a definition of a deep connectedness of people and places” (McAvoy and McDonald, 2003, p. 87).

The first category of the typology is that of inherent and aesthetic place meanings, which the authors claim have only slight cultural variations, as human emotional responses to the particular aesthetics of a landscape are generally similar (Williams and Patterson, 1996). The other categories in their typology serve to reflect cultural differences in relationships with landscapes. These differences are reflected in the importance that individuals assign to one category of meanings over another.

The second category is that of instrumental and goal-oriented meanings, where places are likened to commodities which can be used to fulfill a variety of material and intangible human needs. Within this category, a landscape may be conceived of as a repository of raw materials, or as a forum for recreational pursuits. These types of meanings are distinctly linked to goals incorporating the landscape in some fashion. The success or failure of those goals directly shapes the particular meanings assigned to a landscape.

The third category is that of individual and expressive meanings, which include more individually subjective meanings and relationships with a place. These are the meanings which are held by individuals and reflect personal understandings of a place.
These meanings also often serve to define and maintain individual identities in relation to a particular place.

The authors’ last category is that of cultural and symbolic meanings, or the meanings that social groups attach to places. These landscape meanings are grounded in the historical and cultural significance that are assigned to it by a particular group. These meanings also serve to solidify group identity through the mutual identification of significant symbols and meanings within the landscape. As a social medium, landscapes viewed in this way act as a repository for cultural meaning and identity. Relationships to a landscape that are defined by these types of meanings often involve “spiritual connections to nature, relationships to other humans in the group, and relations to ancestors whose remains may be in the place” (McAvoy, 2002, p. 387).

Various place-based studies of Native American and First Nations peoples have indicated an attachment to place which privileges cultural and symbolic meaning above all other categories (Jostad, McAvoy, and McDonald, 1996; McAvoy, McDonald, and Carlson, 2001; McAvoy and McDonald, 2003). This is in sharp contrast to a tendency by most Anglo-Americans to consider individual place meanings as most important in describing relationships with significant landscapes. In each of these studies, instrumental and goal-oriented meanings were of secondary importance for either cultural group, with individual meanings being least important to Native peoples, and cultural meanings least important to Anglos. This theoretical understanding of how these two cultural approaches to place differ holds important implications for natural resource management of landscapes that are significant to both groups (McAvoy and McDonald, 2003).
These studies also reflect a fundamental cultural difference between American Indian and Anglo-American people in how each group commonly relates to significant landscapes. Whereas individual meanings to place create deeply significant bonds between a person and place, cultural and symbolic meanings occupy an even deeper sense of “history, spirituality, and cultural significance for a whole group” (McAvoy and McDonald, 2003). Place meanings then, serve a primarily cultural, collective function among American Indians, while serving more individualistic, goal-oriented functions among Anglos. It follows that landscape narratives by each group would reflect these different tendencies, and that these cultural differences would also influence all other dimensions of their respective narratives.

This distinction between group and individual meanings is not made to suggest that either approach is more or less correct or intensely felt. What it may indicate, however, are more stable place meanings over time among Native Americans due to the continual reinforcement of collective meaning by different members of a group. Individual meanings may change more over time because they are necessarily more self-sustaining. Because the cultural and symbolic meanings of Native American groups are generally linked to extensive histories, it follows that these groups would have difficulty reconciling the new meanings of an altered landscape, whether changed through the physical manipulation of the land itself, a new restriction of its use, or its revised interpretation and representation.
Identity

An individual’s identification with a particular landscape is directly linked to the meanings and symbols associated with that landscape, and how these intangible qualities resonate within an individual’s sense of identity. For Native American groups, landscapes often embody significant dimensions of a group’s cultural identity through the attachment of important cultural meanings and symbols to certain characteristics and qualities of the landscape. These may also be contained within significant cultural histories or land-use practices which are associated with specific locations or features within the landscape. These places and their associated meanings therefore represent what it means to be, for example, a ‘Blackfeet Indian.’ Narratives allow individuals to draw connections between place meanings and their own identity and affiliation with a larger group.

Identity is also confirmed and sustained through narratives indicating the significance of these intangible meanings, the importance of their role in a person’s life, and the role of a landscape in both representing these meanings, and in providing the opportunity to enact them through land-use practices. This affirmation of identity plays an important role in a person’s sense of belonging and well-being (Proshansky et al., 1983). When these qualities are enacted and sustained through individual narratives and land-use practices across groups of people, they encourage the development of collective interest and identity (Stokowski, 2002).

For groups with longstanding ties to an area, collective attachment to a significant landscape is enhanced through extended opportunities to develop social ties with other residents, as well as to imbue a place with meanings and symbols associated with the
Land-Use Practices

Practices are a means of fulfilling various material, cultural, and spiritual needs. Because relationships with landscapes are multifaceted, the practices that occur within these landscapes are similarly diverse and fulfill a variety of both tangible and intangible needs. Practices help maintain cultural, ecological, and technical knowledge, and where
practices take place is often as important as how, when, and why practices are enacted. For this reason, practices, or ‘on-site’ activities and interactions, are a significant component of Native relationships. Practices may include hunting, gathering medicinal and sacred plants, ritual, and ceremony, as well as family gatherings, berry picking, and other recreational activities which strengthen an individual’s relationship and identity with the landscape.

While many landscape practices may appear to simply represent utilitarian, instrumental functions, research investigating people’s relationships with the environment often describe more holistic, multi-dimensional aspects of practices. Kawamura’s (2004) study of Nez Perce hunting, fishing, and gathering practices shows how traditional subsistence practices serve far more than dietary needs, serving spiritual, social, economic, and political functions as well. From a cultural perspective, these activities are a primary means by which Nez Perce Indians express their ethnic identity. The author emphasizes that despite a reduced reliance on these practices for purely subsistence values, the functions these activities serve still play an essential role in both material and cultural life.

Specific meanings and aspects of identity may also “find expression through the agencies of myth, prayer, music, dance, art, architecture, and, in many communities, recurrent forms of religious and political ritual” (Basso, 1996, p. 110). When analyzing landscape narratives, the researcher must consider practices not only as goal-oriented activities, but as methods of both explicit and implicit personal and cultural expression.

Practices are particularly important to consider in relationships with park landscapes because park policies often restrict many forms of practice. Practices which also serve a
subsistence function, such as hunting or gathering, are often viewed as incompatible with current conceptualizations of national parks. Remaining attuned to the full value of landscape practices helps improve an understanding of the full effect of national parks on Native peoples.

**Political Struggles over Landscapes**

Political struggles over landscapes are often a critical facet of narratives, and these contests manifest in a variety of ways. In the Blackfeet narratives described in this research, political struggle is an integral dimension shaping aspects of meaning, identity, and practice, as it is simultaneously shaped by them. The claims and contests described in narratives are often concerning various types of access directly and indirectly related to the landscape. The ability to influence the park’s dominant narrative and its representation of the landscape’s history and its inhabitants, is also a recurring theme of political struggle.

Struggles to control natural resources are as much struggles over meaning as they are over material resources, in that “claims to use and control resources and to exercise authority over things and people are premised on an ideology or a set of meanings” (Peters, 1984). As landscape meanings also serve to define identities, political struggles over natural resources become conflated with the preservation of a particular way of life and a sense of personal and cultural identity. Because identities “undergo constant transformation...[and] are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power” (Hall, 1990, p. 225), political struggles over significant landscapes are simultaneously struggles over identity.
It is important to note that conflicts over landscapes are not solely over intangible qualities of meaning and identity, but are also over practices which provide food, shelter, and income. Narratives which explicitly invoke struggles over meaning, identity, or material practices, likely describe scenarios which threaten all three dimensions. Conflict and claims are often over access to material resources. Furthermore, conflict is enabled or disabled by power, and considering the historical relationships between groups often proves crucial to understanding contemporary power relations and the nature of conflict, political struggle, and claims to access.

Ribot and Peluso (2003) define access as “the ability to benefit from things—including material objects, persons, institutions, and symbols” (p. 153). Access refers to much more than simply the ability to, for instance, physically enter the parkland and enjoy liberal use of its resources. These authors describe a variety of resources from which access may be constrained through specific political, economic, or cultural frameworks which may require knowledge, wealth, or power to navigate. Many of the demands made by tribes for improved economic opportunity are restricted by a lack of access to technology, capital, and labor. Within national parks, tribal claims include access to markets, authority, knowledge, discourse, and physical access to parkland resources.

Access to markets is often restricted through policies which regulate economic opportunity within national parks. Access to authority may concern the ability to enjoy regular audience with park managers. These same managers may indirectly control access to tribal knowledge which accompanies tribal practices within the parkland. The
loss of access to this knowledge may, however, be largely unknown to park managers when restricting certain material practices.

Contestations by tribes over physical access to parkland resources may appear at first glance to be struggles over the material benefits of natural resources. It is, however, just as important to remain attuned to the potential effects that access restriction and regulation may have on less tangible benefits associated with natural resources. Access restrictions to culturally significant landscapes may produce harmful social effects which may not be easily traceable to issues of access, particularly to those who are outsiders to the affected culture. An understanding of these less visible benefits of land-use practices, along with the cultural roles practices often play, may lend insight into the nature of claims to parkland resources, as well as what types of access may satisfy those claims.

Political struggles over representation are struggles over the discursive power of narrative. Control of discourse includes the power to privilege certain meanings over others, and the ability by individuals or groups to subordinate other narratives to the one which they describe. While discourse alone cannot physically restrict access to resources, it can justify and legitimize restrictions and regulations. In this way, “the ability to shape discursive terms can deeply influence entire frameworks of resource access” (Ribot and Peluso, 2003, p. 169).

**The Role of History**

Narratives invariably emphasize history, both implicitly through its influence on contemporary meanings, cultural identity, and claims, and explicitly through the recounting of historical events. As landscapes are not static entities, but are constantly
accruing meaning and being reinterpreted, narratives describing landscapes are also a continuously evolving product of the historical events preceding the narratives themselves. Political struggles over landscapes must be understood through the historical contexts in which they are framed. These struggles are often rooted in conflicting interpretations of history, with narratives serving to bolster the validity of one particular interpretation and set of claims over another.

In narratives describing historical accounts, events are interpreted through a lens shaped by the cultural premises, or “logics,” held by the interpreter, or narrator (Knowles and Collett, 1989). In narratives describing relationships with significant landscapes, these logics include fundamental assumptions about the nature of the environment and the human relationship with that world. The meanings, identity, practices, and political struggles linked to a landscape also support a particular interpretation of its history. History is thus enlisted in the support of the meanings and other narrative dimensions of landscapes which provide the circular, “incontrovertible logic,” characteristic of narratives.

Current struggles by indigenous groups over national parks typically cannot be viewed in isolation, but rather, are often part of a larger history of land dispossession and disruptive change by outside influences (Brosius and Russell, 2003). How this larger history is “remembered, constructed, and invoked in the present” by these groups shapes all dimensions of current natural resource politics, and the narratives which describe them (Moore, 1993, p. 382). An attention to history lends insight into the nature of indigenous claims, contests over meaning, and the struggle to maintain historical practices and uses of the land.
5. Conclusion

Through narratives, Blackfeet describe in detail their multifaceted relationships with the parkland landscape and the national park institution. Narratives contain the meanings of landscapes, the nature of cultural identification with landscapes, and descriptions of practices. Individuals frame political challenges over landscapes through narratives, justifying their claims to resource access, and invoking historical interpretation to provide legitimacy and logic to these claims.

The multifaceted and overlapping dimensions of narratives convey the complexity of human relationships with the environment. Considering the cultural differences between Western and indigenous understandings of this relationship, narratives across cultures are likely to be significantly different as well. This indicates that a cross-cultural examination of Blackfeet relationships with the park and the parkland can be inherently difficult and subject to misinterpretation. At the same time, cross-cultural research helps begin to build interpretive bridges across cultures, promoting an increased awareness of alternative perspectives.

Focusing on Blackfeet narratives as a tool for understanding Blackfeet relationships with the park and parkland, allows one to examine the ways different aspects of these relationships shape and influence each other. In this way, rather than focusing solely on the quality and character of meanings, identity, or any specific aspect of Blackfeet relationships, interactions between these elements as well as the relationships as a whole can be better understood.

In order to most accurately present Blackfeet perspectives, Blackfeet participants played a primary role in determining the focus of the research within the broad
parameters of the research goals. A focus on narratives also suggests the need for a methodology which allows for a broader, more flexible approach. The next chapter describes the qualitative methodology which framed this approach, as well as other technical aspects of the research process.
Chapter Three:  
Research Methodology

1. Introduction

This chapter serves to describe the methodology used to conduct this research, including aspects of the research process itself, as well as issues important to overall transparency. Along with a description of the interpretive approach used for this research, is a description of the interview process and sampling method. Details about research analysis are followed by an account of my personal history with this research topic and special considerations of cross-cultural research.

The design for this research was determined by an ontological position which takes for granted that natural resources may be perceived in a myriad of ways across cultural and social groups. The goals of this research paradigm are concerned with understanding and communication rather than prediction and control (Patterson and Williams, 1998). Because of these axiological commitments, interpretive research does not aim for generalizability, a measure of how well research findings may be generally applied across contexts. Instead, interpretive research assumes that inevitable differences across contexts make generalizability difficult and potentially inappropriate. As an alternative, interpretive research seeks transferability, in which research results may be appropriately transferred to other contexts based on how well they resemble the original research context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

This paradigmatic position also holds that the researcher is not separate from the phenomenon being studied, and that researchers and participants co-produce knowledge and understanding, which are also contextually bound (Patterson and Williams, 1998).
These philosophical positions, along with the nature of this research project, suggest a particular research methodology as most appropriate and effective.

Because this research sought to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings, values, goals, and claims of the Blackfeet, a qualitative methodology was most appropriate. The use of in-depth, qualitative interviews is an effective method of uncovering meanings, as well as these other dimensions, because it compels participants to describe phenomena in their own words. Participants may also add insights that researchers may not have anticipated. The subtleties of these dimensions are more likely to be discovered within approaches that favor the language of the participants. In other words, Blackfeet meanings, values, goals, and claims are described rather than affirmed, denied, or ranked.

2. Interviews

The data for this research come primarily from semi-structured, qualitative interviews. This approach was appropriate given the broad research questions which informed this research, as well as a need to maintain flexibility in the research design. Given my lack of knowledge about the research context, and the potentially unanticipated aspects of cross-cultural research, flexibility allowed me to make initial adjustments in the research process to account for variables of which I was unaware during research preparation.

Cultural differences between the Blackfeet and myself indicate the potential for fundamental differences in our understandings of landscapes and human relationships with nature. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews allowed participants to more completely describe their perspectives using their own terminology and language rather
than my own. The role of oral transmission of knowledge in Blackfeet culture also strongly suggested the use of interviews as culturally appropriate.

The semi-structured interview format also provided flexibility with the amount of time devoted to each question, and to the question order. This was critical in adjusting interviews to be most effective, particularly in the beginning stages of research. Interview questions were deliberately broad so as to elicit a range of participant responses and interpretations. This was also to ensure that I was able to access unanticipated, emergent topics which were related to the research questions, but which were not addressed by the original interview guide (see Appendix 2).

A qualitative approach in this study also allowed for flexibility during the interview process. Interview procedures and content were slightly altered across the interviews as unanticipated issues arose, based on my initial unfamiliarity with how to conduct culturally appropriate interviews with Blackfeet participants. After an initial period of flexibility with the interview guide and process, I developed a more systematic approach which focused on addressing primary topics rather than following a predetermined order or phrasing of questions. This suited the style and tenor of the interviews, which were always generally informal and conversational in tone.

I used an interview guide to remind myself of the various topics I wished to address, as the interviews only occasionally followed an identical order of topics. In responding to particular questions, many participants spoke freely and at length, often touching on a variety of topics I meant to address, but had yet to raise. The interview guide thus served as a checklist during those participant responses. As I grew more comfortable with the interview process, I refrained from referring to my notes unless absolutely necessary.
This arose from my awareness of how, during early interviews, bringing papers to interviews distracted participants and put them on guard. This was confirmed by the numerous comments participants made about the papers themselves.

Interviews generally took place in the homes of the participants, but also took place in public locations. In order to gain trust from participants, I agreed to meet wherever they suggested. Interviews lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to nearly two hours, depending on how talkative the participant was. All interviews began by a description of the research, my experience in the area, and an assurance that the interview would remain confidential. Oral consent was sought rather than written consent because it appeared to be a more culturally appropriate form of assurance.

Participants were generally not paid, although gifts of tobacco or sweet pine were always brought to interviews once this was indicated to me as an appropriate gesture of appreciation and respect. I did pay seven college students recruited from Blackfeet Community College, $15 each for their time to provide an interview. This was offered as a substitute to these other gifts.

Interviews were tape-recorded in all but two instances, when participants declined to be recorded. Following these two interviews, I immediately left to write notes and impressions while the conversations were still fresh in my mind. Those interviews that were recorded were later professionally transcribed. I reviewed each transcript for accuracy by replaying the interviews.

Participant interviews were used in favor of other qualitative methods such as participant observation or textual analysis specifically because of the cross-cultural nature of this research. Data collected from these other methods are more subject to cross-
cultural misinterpretation, given the lack of description and explanation provided by the participants themselves for the acts or materials under investigation.

3. Sampling

Because the goal of this research was to describe a range of perspectives among the Blackfeet, purposive sampling was most appropriate. Purposive sampling in this research context seeks to elicit the variety of views within a population, where the criteria were deliberately chosen to ensure that a diversity of views were included in the sample. This differs from random sampling, which is typically used instead to generalize results from one group fitting predetermined criteria, to a larger group matching those same criteria (Lofland et al., 2006).

The sample was driven predominantly through participant referrals, as cultural requirements seemed to dictate that I provide a familiar name to potential participants in order to gain their confidence and agreement to be interviewed. The first interviews came through referrals from the Tribal Historic Preservation Office where I received permission to conduct research on the reservation. Following the end of each interview, I asked participants if they might know anyone who would be interested in discussing the same topics with me. This led to a pool of potential participants from which I could then draw, and which grew more diverse as the study proceeded. From this larger pool, I was able to select participants which would meet my criteria for a theoretically diverse sample. As the goal of the study was to understand the range of Blackfeet views towards Glacier National Park, I sought a sample that was broad and diverse.
In order to ensure a diverse sample, I chose criteria that were both easy to verify during the course of an interview, and relevant as potentially dominant characteristics in shaping participant views about and experiences with the park. The participant sample was based on five parameters: gender, age, geographic proximity to the park, economic relationship with the park, and cultural orientation toward a distinctly Blackfeet tradition. A tally of the participant numbers meeting these criteria is provided along with brief notes on the categories themselves (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>AMOUNT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20-40</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>40-60</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geographic</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverse</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trad.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Trad.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Except for gender and age, other sample characteristics were not naturally divided, and so I needed to determine categories in order to compare participants to one another, in order to be able to claim a diverse sample.

In an interview sample of 28 people, 20 were men and eight were women. This was largely a result of participant referrals being males. I believe this may have been due to a number of factors, but primarily because I was a male researcher. I am hesitant to
speculate on cultural factors which may have influenced interview participants to continually refer me to men. Regardless, differences in views and relationships toward the park and parkland based on gender appeared to be negligible.

Age was divided into three categories: 20-40 years old; 40-60 years; 60 and older. The sample had 11 participants in the first two categories, and six in the last.

Geographic proximity to the park was categorized as either ‘Near’ or ‘Far,’ with the communities of East Glacier Park, Starr School, St. Mary, Babb, and individuals living near the Highway 49/89 corridor, categorized as ‘Near.’ Individuals who lived in and around Browning, Heart Butte, and anywhere further away were labeled ‘Far.’ Using this measure, I interviewed 13 participants who lived ‘Near,’ and 12 who lived ‘Far.’

To characterize the economic relationship that participants had with the park, I used three categories. ‘Benefit’ referred to participants who currently or previously earned money because of the park’s presence. Park employment and income from tourism were the primary indicators for this category. ‘Adverse effect’ referred to those who explicitly claimed their economic livelihoods were being restricted by park policies related to business licensing within the park. Those who were adversely affected in this study were two hunting outfitters and one individual who could operate a horseback ride concessionaire. ‘Not affected’ referred to those who perceived they neither directly benefited nor lost from the presence of the park. The sample had seven participants who benefited, three who were adversely affected, and 18 who were not directly affected.

The last category was necessary to ensure that an adequate number of participants represented those who considered themselves ‘traditionalists’: people who actively sought a distinctly ‘Blackfeet’ way of life. I felt there was a need to account for these
potential differences based on McFee’s (1975) ethnography of the “modern-day Blackfeet.” In this study, the author differentiates between “white-oriented” and “Indian-oriented” Blackfeet. Neither term was meant to disparage either group, they simply indicate the predominant cultural characteristics to which either group has apparently gravitated. White-oriented Blackfeet showed a greater display of individualism and acquisitiveness than Indian-oriented Blackfeet, and maintained views that were more consistent with the national economy and culture. Indian-oriented Blackfeet were primarily concerned with “being Indian,” and engaging in practices commonly known as “traditional.” Traditional practices are those passed down from the ancestors through the oral history of the elders and are a primary means of maintaining a ‘Blackfeet’ way of life. Within the context of participant interviews, however, differences appeared to rest more in whether or not an individual engaged in spiritual practices, as the vast majority described strong cultural identification as Blackfeet people, whether traditionalist or not.

Whether or not a person was a traditionalist was often difficult to determine and also, I felt, a potentially inappropriate subject to discuss. I instead considered someone a traditionalist if they spoke about a relationship with the parkland as including Blackfeet spiritual practices. A few participants also self-identified as traditionalists. Those who did not indicate this type of relationship were considered non-traditionalist for the purposes of the research sample. Using this criterion, the sample had 15 participants who were traditionalists, and 13 who were not.
4. Analysis

Analysis is the procedure by which research data are organized into themes and patterns. By describing qualities and characteristics of these themes, and linking them together through an understanding of their interrelationships and influences upon one another, patterns in relationships begin to emerge. The results of the research are clarified through a system, or theory, of the various emergent themes and their interrelationships. The process of analysis began with the coding of interview transcripts.

Coding is the organization of data into significant themes, often through an initial process known as open coding, proceeding to focused, or axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). For this research, open coding involved careful review of the interview transcripts for themes introduced by participants, as well as themes corroborated in the literature. These themes were assigned codes in succinct words or phrases, often using vocabulary used by the participants themselves. This was done in order to remain attentive to themes as they were described by participants.

This process broke interviews down into small fragments with codes being assigned to a sentence or a few words. Often, pieces of the interview immediately before and after the coded fragment were retained in the code to provide better context. I often wrote lengthy memos expanding my thoughts about the meanings latent within the data. Memos are a type of ‘free writing’ where I followed particular thoughts and ideas sparked by participant responses and elaborated them in order to develop potential themes describing what was ‘actually happening.’ This helped me move forward towards a greater conceptual understanding of the literal participant responses. This process of writing as a tool for developing theory and analyzing participant responses was used
throughout the entire research process, especially while writing the thesis chapters. While this may seem obvious, it was often only through continuous writing and revision did themes become clarified, and in this way, analysis was continually occurring as thesis drafts were written and revised.

As initial analysis proceeded, open codes were grouped within more broadly defined codes, and codes which were no longer useful were discarded, so as to give more definite form to the emerging patterns and relationships. Through this process, interview data moved from being defined through “a fairly literal code into a more conceptual one” (Bailey, 2000, p. 129).

The fragmenting process of open coding became less useful when analyzing the later interviews. This is because by this time, I was attuned to particular patterns and relationships within the data which had become much more readily discernible within interview transcripts. I shifted focus to writing lengthy memos on particular pieces of the interviews that held insights into the relationships that were emerging from the collective data. Later interviews in the research process not only served to provide more data, but also to verify emerging themes as well as to discard themes which I focused on during the initial stages of the research but which were proving increasingly irrelevant.

Conceptual organization was aided by the visual aid of drawing theoretical ‘schematics,’ or models of relationships between significant themes upon a dry erase board. This allowed me to organize my thoughts in a somewhat non-linear fashion, from which relationships between the data revealed themselves in ways practically impossible through the use of memos alone.
The interview data were managed through the computer software QSR NVIVO. This software program, rather than serving to analyze the data per se, was used as a method to organize and manage data in such a way that patterns and themes might be more readily apparent. Interview excerpts, related memos, and coding properties could be easily grouped together and managed in relation to other codes, their properties, and related memos.

Interview quotes are italicized throughout this thesis to readily indicate participant voices in the text. This was done primarily because many short excerpts from participant interviews are often embedded within larger bodies of text. For consistency, larger quotes which are indented as blocks of text are italicized as well.

Shorter excerpts from interviews are often bundled together to provide greater description of ideas that are generally straightforward and require less interpretation. More complex themes are generally presented through the use of longer quotes, which were selected based on how well they described the various themes which emerged during analysis. These quotes were often the clearest, most detailed, and most interesting excerpts from the interviews. Most themes are fleshed out in the text through the use of a few different quotes, which also show the diverse ways participants described these ideas. When there was stark disagreement among some of the participants over a particular theme, examples of these perspectives are provided.

Quotes were deliberately selected from as many participants as possible in order to guard against a tendency to focus on only a few speakers. This goal also helped ground themes in the entire data set rather than within only a few select interviews. Quotes chosen for the text are representative of the larger data set, which is provided, in part, in
Appendix 3. While not comprehensive, the quotes in Appendix 3 provide added depth to the various themes described in results Chapters Four and Six. References to these additional quotes are provided as footnotes to the corresponding chapter sub-sections, and a cross-referenced resource for examining the quotes is provided within the appendix itself.

The appendix does not provide quotes for Chapter Five because this chapter describes the Blackfeet historical narrative and draws in part on historic resources and in part on interview data. The interview data in Chapter Five is more focused on Blackfeet accounts of historic events and thus did not demand further explanation to the extent that themes in Chapters Four and Six did.

Of the 28 participants who were interviewed for this research, 15 different participants are quoted in Chapter Four; 12 are quoted in Chapter Five; and 20 are quoted in Chapter Six. For the entire thesis, 25 different participants are quoted.

5. Research Ethics and Data Management

As with any study, an explicit design for the collection and management of data, as well as for its analysis, is necessary to meet the ethical requirement to protect participants from harm. This is even more critical in smaller communities where a breach of confidence or an inappropriate use of the data may have a more pronounced effect than it would in larger populations. When the research involves indigenous groups, a new layer of concern and care over addressing potential issues of exploitation, cooptation, and misrepresentation must be added.
This recognition aids in maintaining a healthy awareness of my own cultural bias, the affect I may have on Blackfeet participants, and the nature of the data collected through our exchanges. Researchers need to be aware of their role as both a facilitator during the interview process, as well as a participant in the negotiation of meaning (Brandenburg and Carroll, 1995).

This follows the epistemological belief that “what is learned in research does not exist independently of the researcher” (Bailey 2007, p. 54). This indicates the importance of paying attention to not only the research findings as they emerge, but to the social process of the research as well (Esterberg 2002). This was done through an explicit acknowledgment of researcher bias (described in more detail below), while also remaining attuned to my influence on the group being researched, and through an overall transparency surrounding the research design and its findings.

Of primary concern throughout this research was the notion of consent. Piquemal (2001) describes consent as a “circular process” beginning with gaining consent from proper tribal authorities, maintaining consent by continually consulting with participants about the research process, and finally, gaining consent over how the research results are used and disseminated. She describes consent as “not just a contract, [but] an ongoing process of renegotiation” (77). Marshall and Batten (2004) also conclude that an ongoing process of communication and consent is the most appropriate means for conducting ethical research among indigenous communities.

These concerns also give rise to issues of ‘ownership’ of the data and its analysis. As stated to participants, in addition to this thesis, I envision this research producing both a document to present to the park for employee education, as well as one to a more
academic audience. This can be roughly differentiated between a more applied versus theoretical form of the research information. The park employee piece will introduce Blackfeet perspectives to an unfamiliar audience, and will be necessarily endorsed by a tribal body or collection of individuals as determined by the Blackfeet IRB. The tribe will ‘own’ this version of the study results, as I will not presume to represent the tribe in its associations with the National Park Service and the park concessionaires. I will own the research in its thesis form, as well as the rough data. In addition to these versions of the research, the thesis itself will be presented to the Blackfeet Tribal Historic Preservation Office and Blackfeet Community College, as well as the archival library for Glacier National Park.

I retain ownership of the data because I believe the threat to confidentiality that access to the data may pose, particularly in a small community, is real enough to necessitate this, despite the cultural issues of domination and knowledge appropriation it may raise. Ultimately, as guardian of the data, I may ensure that this does not happen. One way to do this is to remain available to the tribe following the study, in order to answer questions and address concerns. Maintaining an open line of communication regarding any aspect of the data or its use will be the primary course for ensuring its ethical treatment.

The primary means of ensuring confidentiality to participants in the study was through the deletion of any identifying characteristics within interview transcripts and written observations, the use of multiple pseudonyms for each participant, deletion of audiotapes after interview transcription, and keeping participant identification keys separate from the data while at the study site.
Approval/IRB/THPO

The process for approval of this project involved both the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Montana, as well as an equivalent authority on the Blackfeet Reservation. Naturally, tribal approval of this project was of primary importance, and the university chose to maintain a secondary role, granting approval contingent upon tribal approval.

I approached the Tribal Historic Preservation Office, which was indicated to me as the appropriate body for granting approval of any research taking place on the reservation. After a brief meeting and the presentation of my research proposal, I was granted permission a short time later. The primary stipulation by the office was a copy of the final document for tribal records.

I also applied for and was granted approval by Blackfeet Community College to spend an afternoon recruiting college students to participate in this research. This amounted to a table set up in a public area on campus so that students could approach me only if they were interested. This was to avoid placing any pressure on their participation.

The process of research approval within the Blackfeet community resembled an “ongoing process of renegotiation” (Piquemal, 2001, p. 77), where the researcher makes a continuous effort to gain the “free and informed consent” of all participants in the study. I approached each potential informant in the same way I had approached the tribal office and the community college, which included the full disclosure of my background in the area, my purposes for this study, and my use of any interview information. A number of
the participants required that I present them with a final draft of the thesis as a contingency for their participation.

6. Personal History

In order to provide transparency to this research, I am also providing a summary of my personal experience and background as it relates to this research. This is to indicate potential researcher bias, as well as to provide a sense of legitimacy concerning some of the assumptions that I make in referencing the NPS, park concessions, the Blackfeet, or any other aspect of Glacier National Park for which I do not provide a direct citation. I tried to refrain from such assumptions, and where they do occur, they are less ‘assumptions’ than they are details of a direct and lengthy experience with the study site.

I have spent eleven seasons, May through September, working in Glacier National Park, with eight of those seasons spent on the east side of the park bordering the Blackfeet Reservation. I lived in East Glacier Park for five of those seasons, a primary reason for my decision to move there while conducting interviews for this project. I also lived in St. Mary for two seasons, and spent a season in Many Glacier. This cumulative experience has spanned the last fourteen years, beginning in 1994.

My employment experience has also varied significantly, working for the largest corporate concession in the park, Glacier Park Incorporated, as well as much smaller, privately owned businesses situated just outside the park boundary. Most significantly, I’ve spent five seasons with the NPS in Glacier, with all but one season under east side management. This is significant because Blackfeet encounters with park service
personnel occur predominantly on this side of the park. Park locations on the west side of the park were rarely mentioned by research participants.

While working for the NPS, I was stationed at the Two Medicine ranger station, while residing in East Glacier Park. I then spent the next four seasons as a backcountry ranger within the park. Two of these seasons were based out of St. Mary, where the east side headquarters is located. The experience and knowledge I gained through time spent with the NPS certainly colors my interpretation of the relationship between the Blackfeet people and Glacier National Park. I believe this experience significantly helped me during interviews by enabling me to knowledgeably discuss matters pertaining to park policy and the attitudes of park service personnel.

While neither prior to nor during this study did I actively solicit park service personnel perspectives and attitudes, I believe my time spent within the park service was sufficient to discern and articulate a basic ‘park culture,’ which included attitudes toward and stereotypes about Blackfeet people. On the other hand, my limited experience within Blackfeet culture through the interview and research process also sensitized me to general Blackfeet attitudes and stereotypes about NPS personnel. I feel that I can, therefore, articulate the two sides’ imagined picture of the other. This proved valuable when attempting to understand and interpret interview responses by the research participants.

My personal experience in the area focused most heavily on the parkland. I was much less familiar with the interior of the reservation, and in fact, generally avoided Browning if possible. I had had mixed experiences with Blackfeet, and enough negative ones to compel me to interact with them selectively. For instance, I enjoyed friendly and confiding relationships with Blackfeet employed by the NPS, but rarely sought these
relationships on the reservation itself. I believe this is a common position taken by park employees, particularly those unfamiliar with the region and the tribe. I would even posit that this subtle segregation is a result of a park service culture that does not encourage interaction with local communities just across the border. This is explicitly the case with some concession companies, where past employees have been officially instructed to avoid the reservation and its inhabitants altogether (personal communication, 2003).

These instructions were justified by companies on the grounds that employees often frequent reservation bars and these warnings were a way to dissuade this behavior. However, one can certainly guess the sort of impression these warnings make on employees who are completely new to the area, many of whom have never interacted with American Indians before. In fact, my research project was also a deliberate attempt to simply bridge the formidable gap which exists between the reservation and the park. The project was a way of testing how receptive the tribe and a selection of its members would be to sharing their thoughts and opinions about the national park with an outsider. This is important simply as a gauge for future interaction and deliberation between the two groups, for this ultimately, is the desired result of this foray into the ‘opposing’ camp.

There is certainly a park culture in place which tends to view the Blackfeet as adversaries. I have heard numerous park employees challenge the notion that the Blackfeet have any right to preferential hiring in the park because they perceive Blackfeet to be unreliable and lazy. I tend to see a park culture in place which is often antagonistic toward Blackfeet, even if only expressed through joking asides about “needing to watch them [Blackfeet] so we can pick up after them” (personal communication, September,
Blackfeet, however, see the park as much more hostile, resulting in a sense of being under constant surveillance within the park boundary.

I should also state that I tended to participate in this park culture that I speak of, and shared these sentiments. It was not until I left the park after ten seasons and learned of the history that exists between the park and the tribe, independently of my park service tenure, that I began to understand that there were more complex scenarios playing themselves out. I highlight that I learned this history independent of my employment in the park because it underscores the ignorance most park employees likely have towards the tribe, and the absence of an NPS priority to educate their own employees about topics related to the tribe. This, then, was the impetus for this research and an eleventh season in the area: to improve an understanding sorely lacking within the national park boundary.

The next chapter begins an examination of the research results, describing Blackfeet relationships with the Glacier parkland landscape.
Chapter Four:  
Blackfeet Relationships with the Glacier Parkland Landscape

1. Introduction

While national park landscapes are valued by the general public for the benefits of their protected environments, their aesthetic beauty, recreation opportunities, and nationalist symbolism, American Indian tribes often relate to these same landscapes in very different ways. Many of these same benefits are certainly valued by Native peoples, however, parklands are also valued by tribes as landscapes of their own extensive cultural history and use. These lands were often integrated into the material, cultural, and spiritual well-being of their peoples, generally long before the arrival of white traders, settlers, and eventually, tourists. Conflict and misunderstanding between tribes and the NPS often arise from park restrictions to the access and use of these landscapes, and from their representation to park visitors as places without significant human history. Despite the positive role that many national parks play in protecting landscapes important to tribes, there exist many qualities and characteristics of parks which disrupt and inhibit Native relationships with these landscapes.

For most Americans, Glacier National Park represents a vignette of primitive America before the influence of human activity on the land. The Glacier landscape is valued for a variety of benefits derived from its ‘wild’ state, and is managed in order to minimize human influences on its natural environment. This contrasts with Blackfeet views which conceive of the Glacier landscape as a place shaped by the use and presence of the Blackfeet people for millennia, and a place that is thus integral to Blackfeet well-being. These contrasting cultural perspectives shape different understandings of what
constitutes appropriate and inappropriate human activity within the Glacier landscape, and appropriate and inappropriate use of the landscape’s natural resources. These differences have significantly influenced the often contentious history between the Blackfeet and the park. In order to better understand Blackfeet relationships with the national park, it is first necessary to examine Blackfeet relationships with the park landscape.

As described earlier, in order to more accurately discern between Blackfeet relationships with the Glacier landscape and those with the national park institution, it is necessary to conceptually separate the institution from the landscape itself. This is important because in isolating the landscape from the institution, the effects of the park institution upon the Blackfeet people, in particular their relationships with the landscape, are made more apparent. While this may appear difficult in practice, as no living Blackfeet remembers a time when the landscape was not also the national park, Blackfeet still describe relationships with the ‘land,’ and the ‘mountains,’ in ways which transcend the presence of the national park and link themselves and the landscape to a pre-park history and tradition. For the purpose of clarity in this research, I use the term ‘parkland’ to refer to the landscape, and the term ‘park’ to refer to the national park institution. The parkland is a part of Mistakis, the Backbone of the World, in which Blackfeet cultural identity and heritage were established long before the idea for Glacier National Park was conceived. Blackfeet commonly refer to the parkland as “the mountains,” and the terms are used interchangeably in this thesis.

This chapter describes the significance of the parkland to the Blackfeet and the role it plays in various aspects of their lives. Understanding some of the primary themes of
Blackfeet relationships with the parkland is critical to an understanding of Blackfeet relationships with the national park, and lends insight into the full value of the park and the cultural landscape in its charge. Blackfeet narratives of the parkland suggest the ways in which park policy and presence affect Blackfeet well-being, as well as potential sources of cooperation and conflict between the tribe and the park in the management and representation of this landscape.

2. Blackfeet Identity and the Parkland

That’s essentially how I view the park, as part of the homeland, part of my homeland. 10

Blackfeet relationships with the parkland have evolved through generations of material, cultural, and spiritual use of the area. The parkland has always played a significant role in the well-being of the Blackfeet people, although this role has changed dramatically since the establishment of the national park. The mountains still continue to occupy a central position in many Blackfeet lives both geographically and otherwise.

A defining feature of Blackfeet relationships with the parkland is the extent to which Blackfeet identity is connected to the landscape. Blackfeet cultural identification with the parkland must first be understood as part of a historical tradition dating back thousands of years, maintained into the present. Significant aspects of Blackfeet culture and spirituality, as well as traditional means of subsistence, were established within the parkland long before the creation of the national park. Because of this legacy, many Blackfeet view themselves and their culture as an essential part of the parkland landscape.
Blackfeet Origins and the Parkland

The oral tradition of the Blackfeet (Piikáni) claims that they, along with the other two tribes of Nitsitapii (Kainaa, or Blood, and Siksiká, or Blackfoot), emigrated east across the mountains long ago in search of food. Once they arrived they separated into three groups and established themselves across the land. There are a few versions of the history related to the naming of the tribes, but the common theme in these stories is that the three tribes and their family lineages were established in this region. While the Nitsitapii came to this region long ago from elsewhere, the Piikáni, Kainaa, and Siksiiká bands have lived nowhere else.

This account of an extensive historical presence in the region was widely disputed among historians who at one point claimed that the Nitsitapii arrived in this region less than 300 years ago, perhaps as refugees from the boreal forests of the Great Lakes region, where other tribes spoke a similar Algonquian tongue. The claim that the Nitsitapii were first pushed west by the Cree was supported in works by John Ewers (1958), and Jack Holterman (1985), both authorities on Blackfeet history and culture. This position is also the official stance of the NPS publication, *Man in Glacier* (Buchholtz, 1976). While the NPS now acknowledges the presence of humans in the parkland thousands of years ago, their relation to modern-day Blackfeet is only confirmed as a possibility (History and Culture, n.d.).

Recent archaeological evidence has served to undermine these popular accounts and to support the Nitsitapii oral history of an extensive residence (Reeves, 1993; Greiser and Greiser, 1993). Excavation of pottery shards and arrow points similar to more recent designs indicates a residence extending back potentially thousands of years. This
evidence is corroborated by linguistic studies determining the Blackfoot language to be the most ancient of Algonquian languages, suggesting an eastward movement of the language into the Great Lakes region (Denny, 1991; Goddard, 1994). Genetic studies of Algonquian-speakers (Szathmary-Emoke and Auger, 1983) also determined the Nitsitapii to be the most genetically isolated of all Algonquian groups, which suggests an extended residence, regardless of the direction of emigration (see Reeves and Peacock, 2001, for a detailed analysis of all evidence).

What these various types of evidence corroborate are Blackfeet narratives describing a presence pre-dating all other inhabitants and lasting thousands of years. While the traditional homeland for the Blackfeet people was historically several times larger than their current reservation, they still inhabit land on which their ancestors once resided, maintaining a presence established long ago; as this participant explains:

*I often tell the people this: I say that before any missionary ever came here, before any church was established, before any trapper or trader came here, our people were established upon this land. We had an economy. We had an infrastructure that kept our people unified. We had a belief that kept us strong.*

The Blackfeet presence, their spiritual traditions and subsistence practices, were well established before the arrival of Anglo peoples. To many participants, the primacy of Blackfeet habitation in this region and the degree to which the mountains were integrated into Blackfeet lives, strengthens a sense of the legitimacy of the Blackfeet presence and claims to the parkland. The various roles the parkland played in Blackfeet history are evident in the diversity of descriptions participants gave the parkland. Not only is it a part of “*the homeland,*” the parkland is also described as the Blackfeet “*summer campground,*” (21) where Blackfeet bands came to gather materials unavailable on the plains. It is described as a “*resource bank,*” and “*a life-giving source,*” and is where you
can find the image of Napi, the Creator, embedded in the mountains (23). As this participant describes, the mountains are directly integrated into all aspects of Blackfeet culture: “They’re in our ceremonies, they’re in our stories, they’re in our language. They have everything to do with Blackfeet religion or [being] Blackfeet. So they play a major part in our culture...probably one of the most important parts” (15).

Blackfeet identity is inseparable from the parkland because of the role the parkland has played in the evolution and development of the Blackfeet culture. While omitting specific details, this participant’s comments about the role of the mountains in ceremonies, which often require sacred materials gathered from the parkland; in stories, which describe events that took place at specific locations within the parkland; and in the language, with Blackfoot words describing the unique resources, entities, and geography of the mountains, express the integral role of the parkland to Blackfeet life. The mountains are also an essential part of Blackfeet religion because of the many sacred beings which inhabit them, and the abundance of sacred sites integral to Blackfeet spiritual practices.

This shared historical and cultural legacy also shapes a common Blackfeet identity. Even in the absence of direct familial or personal history with the mountains, a connection and identification with the parkland exists on a fundamental level for Blackfeet by virtue of these legacies. This is not to suggest that all Blackfeet share identical cultural beliefs and values, but rather, to emphasize the communal nature of Blackfeet social and cultural understandings of themselves and their place in the world.1

1 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 1-8, 11, 12, 28, 30, 31, 37, 38, 43.
The Blackfeet Collective

Blackfeet frame their identities with the mountains from a primarily collective perspective. This is reflected in a cultural tendency to speak as a member of a group, rather than from an individual perspective, when describing relationships with the mountains. Parkland meanings are more often described in terms of ancestral legacies, cultural traditions, and family histories, than they are through individual experiences and interpretations.

The influence of the collective in contemporary Blackfeet society and culture is sustained through extensive familial and kinship relations across the reservation, as well as in this common cultural identification with the mountains and their place in Blackfeet history. This influence is apparent in the narrative voice individuals use to describe their relationships with the parkland. Personal narratives about the parkland appear as part of a collective narrative, which is most obviously indicated by the use of the plural voice ‘we,’ rather than ‘I,’ in response to individually-directed questions. Narratives about the parkland are not just narratives of individual experience, but are also about collective experience. Speaking as a part of the collective, this participant describes the role the mountains play in remembering his ancestral past:

They [Blackfeet] get up in the mountains and they see what we had, or once where we lived, you know, they’re going to get that feeling...And why we lived like that is because we had those mountains right there. And that feeling, in a way, it kind of brings back the past, you know. Kind of like, ‘Oh, I could see why we lived here. I could see why we fought for this land right here.’

Blackfeet knowledge of their legacy in the area and in the mountains in particular, establishes a basic connection to the parkland, difficult to articulate, but powerful and affirming. It makes sense to this participant that his people used the mountains; they
were “right here,” and once a person got back into them, he would understand why they played such a significant role in Blackfeet history, and why the struggle to maintain these relationships continues. The strength of connection between Blackfeet individuals and the mountains is augmented by the weight of this Blackfeet collective experience and history in the mountains:

_Actually the mountains have always been a part of our lives...I don’t care where you go in the United States or even in the world, for us, as Blackfeet or Piikáni people, these mountains always represent that...You talk about Glacier, you can’t exclude the Blackfeet. You can’t, because Glacier is the Blackfeet._

This speaker declares that no other geographical location more aptly personifies the Blackfeet people than the parkland: “Glacier is the Blackfeet.” In describing what the mountains “always represent,” he is referring back to his opening remark about how intimately the Blackfeet feel about the mountains, which have “always been a part of [their] lives.” For this participant, the mountains represent Blackfeet history from its beginning. The presence of Glacier National Park does not diminish the cultural connection that the Blackfeet share with the parkland; for this participant, the strength of this connection and cultural identification is literally a part of the landscape, so that when “you talk about Glacier, you can’t exclude the Blackfeet.”

**Cultural Identity through Storytelling**

Cultural identification with the parkland is often strengthened through stories describing family legacies within the parkland, as well as through more commonly known cultural stories about specific places in the parkland. The power of these stories

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2 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 2-5, 7-9, 14, 19, 29-31, 36-39, 43.
rests in their ability to link the knowledge and understanding they provide to specific places in the landscape which can be revisited. These places then act as repositories of memory, experience, knowledge, and understanding to be accessed when needed. Because of the lengthy Blackfeet presence and integration of their material, cultural, and spiritual lives within the parkland, the landscape is literally filled with an abundance of these significant stories and the information they contain. Identity is then explicitly linked to specific locations within the parkland through these stories. This is reflected in this Blackfeet woman’s description of what the mountains mean to her:

To me? It has history because my family, I mean, I could go back seven generations on both sides of my family. And a lot of the oral history was brought down all the way to me. So the ties I have are the mountains over by St. Mary’s...And grandpa used to tell my dad all those stories. Then we would go into the park, and he’d show me actual places where those people lived and where grandma and grandpa lived...We know those mountains. I mean, we have the stories that go with the places there. 14

For this participant, knowing the mountains is to know the places where her relatives lived and the significant events of their lives. To see the mountains is to hear the stories which remind her of who she is and where she came from. Within stories about ancestors, family history, and personal experiences, are pieces of cultural knowledge and insight, framed through the Blackfeet worldview. These stories not only serve to preserve this distinct understanding, but to maintain and preserve a person’s identification with a particular place. The parkland landscape is filled with these significant meaning-filled places:

I think in growing up, all of the stories that gave us meaning, meaning to our lives, came out of those mountains. When my family came together, they always talk about going up to Upper Cut Bank Creek and back into the park. There’s a sliding place called the Gray Mare’s Tail that’s a natural slide. And then my family always went picking berries. They talk about going back there. 27
Stories from the mountains served to shape this participant’s understanding and view of the world. These stories gave meaning to her and her family’s lives, and the places where these stories took place became imbued with meaning by association. The mountains which hold these repositories of memory, experience, and meaning become the physical embodiment of the quality and character of those stories. As this speaker continues:

So it was always a feeling like, ‘It’s part of who I am.’ It’s the mountains: part of who I am; and different places we got ran out by a bear; all those kinds of things. Plus the cohesiveness of knowing who were your relatives. Those stories, I maintain even though we’re not able to do those things anymore. Because of that, I know who I’m related to, because of those stories...they’re embedded in, this sounds crazy, but under the Old Gray Mare’s Tale. So those kinds of stories extend clear from St. Mary’s all the way over, including the Marias [River].

Personal experiences from the parkland play a fundamental role in shaping this woman’s identity, so that when considering what the mountains mean to her, and the essence of her relationship with them, she finds they quite literally are a “part of who [she is].” Pieces of her identity are “embedded” within significant locations throughout the parkland, so that when she views the landscape in its entirety, it teems with memories, meanings, and personal identity. Stories serve to retain knowledge of family lines and kinship networks, further strengthening a sense of Blackfeet identity. As this participant notes, “even though we’re not able to do [those things] anymore, because of those stories I know who I’m related to.”

This familiarity with the landscape, such that memories and meanings are explicitly tied to specific places, highlights a primary difference between most national park visitors and local residents. For the Blackfeet, the strength of this familiarity is
augmented by a collective cultural and spiritual investment in the mountains, establishing an even stronger connection and sense of identity with the parkland.³

**Place-Names in the Parkland**

The historical legacy of the Blackfeet is most prominently displayed in the abundance of Blackfeet place-names throughout the parkland. Blackfeet family names and descriptive names are interspersed with the names of early park proponents and white settlers. Glacier place-name authority, Jack Holterman, credits James Willard Schultz, prolific author and friend of the Blackfeet, with assigning most of the current Blackfeet names to the mountains (Holterman, 1985). Probably the most important exception is Ninaistáakis, or Chief Mountain, named by the ancient Nitsitapii, and the most powerful and sacred site within the Nitsitapii sacred geography.

Despite not having been bestowed by Blackfeet, the many Blackfeet names attached to mountains, lakes, and rivers of the parkland, further strengthen a sense of Blackfeet identity with the landscape. Many of these names are found among families on the reservation today. As one participant described (28), family outings into the park included a stop along the Going-to-the-Sun Road next to the mountain with their family’s namesake. Their Indian name and its attachment to the peak maintain and preserve the family’s sense of a legacy inseparable from that of the parkland. Even without visiting the mountain or entering the park, the knowledge of the presence of names preserves that connection and identification with the landscape. Blackfeet names are not only found on many of the park’s natural features, but also on park merchandise, park literature, and in

³ Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 11, 27, 34.
Indian and non-Indian owned businesses around the park. While the names further validate the connection between the Blackfeet and the parkland, some more appropriately than others, this participant expresses a deeper sense of connection that transcends a name:

Our family heritage is tied up in that park. Even if they hadn’t been named after these people, it still would be...Naming a mountain after my great grandfather, or great, great, great grandfather doesn’t make it any more important...I mean, it helps, but my whole knowledge about that place goes way back. 23

For this Blackfeet elder, cultural identity transcends more deeply than a name, and in making this statement, he indirectly reminds us that naming mountains does not begin their history, nor does establishing a national park supplant his family heritage. The strength of this identification with the mountains frames the nature of Blackfeet claims to the landscape, and Blackfeet tensions toward Glacier National Park. Many Blackfeet claim an aboriginal right to the resources of the parkland based on the primacy of their habitation in the area. This political claim is used to challenge NPS authority, but on a more visceral level, Blackfeet identification with the landscape promotes a sense of the legitimacy of the Blackfeet presence. When that presence is denied or inhibited by national park policy or NPS presence, the park becomes a target for Blackfeet frustration and anger. 4

3. Responsibility and Reciprocity

When I go up there [to the mountains], it’s a sense like I’ve been up here before, you know. You get that feeling like this is a part of you and you have something to do up here. 15

4 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 10, 27, 28.
The strength of identification many Blackfeet feel toward the mountains often compels them to act in particular ways. This participant’s motivation to act is directly linked to his personal identity, and to a broader historical and cultural legacy in which that Blackfeet identity is framed. He describes an understanding of this greater context as “a sense like [he’s] been up here before.” This understanding and identification with his ancestral past, makes the mountains feel like “a part of [him],” further integrating his identity with the parkland. While this participant is unable to articulate what it is that he should do in response to this cultural identification with the mountains, he has no doubt that he must do something.

Participants describe this motivation to act as they might a sense of responsibility or duty to maintain and preserve their unique cultural identity. These acts, or practices, are ways in which Blackfeet access the tangible and intangible resources of the parkland. Practices include gathering sacred and medicinal plants, gathering firewood and picking berries, hunting, spiritual ritual and ceremony, and family gatherings, although many of these are prohibited within the parkland and are necessarily practiced elsewhere. Beyond the material values they serve, practices also strengthen cultural identity, and serve to maintain and preserve cultural knowledge and understanding. Responsibility to preserve Blackfeet culture is a response by many Blackfeet to threats from acculturative influences. For these Blackfeet, practices are more than a responsibility to one’s identity; they are also acts of resistance.
Responsibility to Blackfeet Culture

Preserving the traditions and knowledge of Blackfeet identity also addresses a responsibility to the ancestors and to future generations of Blackfeet. Blackfeet relationships with the parkland are framed within the Blackfeet’s own historical legacy and cultural experience upon the landscape, and modern Blackfeet relationships are an extension of this heritage. This cultural experience and identity is generally passed on through oral teaching and demonstration rather than through the written word, and so must be actively preserved across generations, or else the Blackfeet risk its loss to the passage of time and the deaths of the elders. This understanding compels many Blackfeet to pursue a greater knowledge of their culture and their Blackfeet identity out of a sense of responsibility, otherwise, as this Blackfeet participant fears:

_We’re going to lose future generations that will say, ‘I respect those mountains just the way my grandfather and grandmother respected them.’ Or, ‘I value them the way they valued them.’ Because if not, it’s just, okay, they’re just there, you know. Eventually they’ll just drive by and not even take a second thought as to why the mountains are there, what the significance of them is._

This speaker fears the loss of traditional perspectives, and the unique knowledge and understanding which accompanies them. The value in maintaining these traditional understandings lies in knowing “why the mountains are there.” This knowledge suggests that the mountains exist for a reason, and serve distinct roles and purposes to the Blackfeet. This speaker seeks to preserve this knowledge for its own intrinsic value; an accumulated wisdom of Blackfeet experience preserved by past generations. This responsibility also invariably extends to all Blackfeet ancestors, for the knowledge and legacy of grandparents, is in turn the knowledge and legacy of their grandparents.
For another participant, this legacy is, “like a sixth sense, you might say, within me, the Blackfeet aspect of it. And that is to use the land and to practice what my ancestors had always done. And it’s just a natural thing for me to do, and I enjoy it” (12). He describes his inclination to practice in a particular way as if it were encoded in his identity as a “sixth sense.” His sixth sense both acknowledges his identity, and compels him to engage in practices which reaffirm his identity. This is explicitly done through the reenactment of practices which he identifies as being culturally appropriate and authentic to his Blackfeet heritage. His sense of responsibility also extends to his ancestors, and to the culture which they practiced.

Both this participant, as well as the young Blackfeet who felt a sense like he had “been up here before” in the mountains, describe their identification with the landscape as an extension of their normal senses. This supra-ordinary sense appears to be unavailable to non-Blackfeet because it is a unique aspect of Blackfeet identity. Not everyone across the Blackfeet population, however, shares this same degree of cultural identification with the parkland and thus, the same sense of responsibility. As the following participant describes, despite traditional cultural taboos and the influence they continue to exert upon Blackfeet today, others remain detached from these traditional ethics:

Like the bear, the grizzly, those animals, we never killed those animals. And today a lot of Blackfeet won’t kill bears. But some will, you know. So it just kind of, I think, depends on how you were brought up and the connection that you were given to that place. 14

This participant suggests that the ethics a person chooses to follow are influenced by his or her connection or identification with the landscape. Also, she indicates that connections don’t just happen; they aren’t a natural extension of being Blackfeet, but are
Responsibility to Others

Responsibility does not extend solely to the legacy of Blackfeet identity; it also extends to interactions between Blackfeet and other entities of the parkland.

Relationships with the parkland involve interactions with animals, and other spirits and beings unfamiliar to Western culture. Blackfeet traditionally conceptualize all beings as either humans or “Other than Human Beings” (Reeves and Peacock, 2001), thus conceiving of animals and so-called ‘supernatural’ beings, as closely related. Blackfeet traditionally conceive of a greater sense of egalitarianism between humans and animals than Western perspectives, which translates into interactions which often follow Blackfeet social principles. As this participant explains:

*The Blackfeet have a kind of different perspective of the bear culture. The way I’ve always understood it is the bear is like your brother, just like another human being. And I actually just heard this yesterday; they said long ago one of the Natives killed a bear, and they skinned it, and it looked exactly like a human. So a bear then attacked one of the Indians. And later on it was said that they made an agreement that, you killed me and I killed you, but we’re not going to do that anymore. And they made an agreement that they wouldn’t attack each other anymore.* 16

Social interactions within Blackfeet culture are often influenced by a principle of reciprocity, and this principle often extends to non-human entities with whom Blackfeet interact. This participant describes a relationship based upon a reciprocated peace, and in so doing, also grants bears the agency to choose to reciprocate and refrain from harming

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5 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 11, 13, 14, 35, 37, 40.
Blackfeet. This belief that bears will not attack Indians is actually quite prevalent among
the Blackfeet, and at least supports the notion that Blackfeet conceive of relationships
with animals through a decidedly non-Western lens.

These reciprocal responsibilities are not necessarily elaborate, as they are quite
simply an extension of how one may act within the human community. As this
participant describes, the act itself can be a simple gesture of restraint:

_We leave things alone, because we were taught. I know my grandparents taught
me to only take what you need. If you take berries, take what you need, leave the
rest, because there's going to be somebody else or either the animals are going to
eat them. We're supposed to respect everything._

Responsibility here extends explicitly to animals, but also addresses much more.
This practice of restraint is a value passed down from her grandparents, and potentially
reflects an even older cultural understanding. By taking only what she needs, this elder
also fulfills a responsibility to her grandparents and their cultural tradition. She also
fulfills a responsibility to others by leaving berries for them to gather. Ideally, this will in
turn be reciprocated by them, and so will indefinitely maintain a balance where
everything benefits: the land, the people, the animals.

While this particular land ethic appears to be a form of sustainable use, the impetus
for this woman’s practice comes from a much different understanding. The modern
conservation movement was established as a response to widespread degradation of the
natural environment, and so the practice of “sustainable use” explicitly addresses
concerns over ecological health. While this participant is certainly concerned about the
health of the land, the responsibility she senses is based on a concern with reciprocity,
rather than solely the prevention of environmental degradation. As she states, “there’s
going to be somebody else or either the animals are going to eat them. We’re supposed to respect everything."  

Responsibility to the Land

Blackfeet concerns over the health of the parkland often arise from a complex set of social concerns. These concerns are often shaped by the same social principles extended to other entities. The land is also often described by participants in terms unfamiliar to Western concepts about the nature of land. As this participant describes, the land not only supports all life, it also appears as life:

\[ \text{The way the people talk about those mountains, it is the Backbone of the World. And people say the rivers and streams that come out of there are like the blood vessels that give us life. The water is life. We know that’s where the water comes from. And without the water, there is no life.} \]

This participant suggests that the Blackfeet are well aware of the ecological value of the mountains, realizing that without the resources they provide the well-being of the tribe would be in jeopardy. His description also suggests that Blackfeet relate to the land as if to another entity. The land bears a resemblance to the human body, and from a slightly different perspective, embodies the human form on a vast scale. This conceptualization bears out in the ways that some people describe interactions with the land as reciprocal exchanges.

Many participants reiterated this sense of the parkland as a source of life, filled with natural resources which historically sustained the Blackfeet. Traditional relationships with the land were seen as maintaining the land’s health by preserving a natural balance.

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6 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 14, 19, 20, 22, 24, 29, 32, 33, 37.
between the people and the land. As the people relied upon the resources of the parkland, this balance ideally included the use of resources provided by the land, such as food, water, shelter, and medicine. These resources were seen as gifts to be used by the people. As this Blackfeet woman describes, interactions with the land require an awareness of social responsibilities as well as ecological ones:

*I think the park misses the people...*There’s a belief in being a part of the land that if you, well, it’s like this. When I go picking sweetgrass, and it’s difficult because they don’t grow in a big bunch. You can’t just pick a bunch of grass and walk off. It’s like here and there and there and there. One of them, when you’re looking, will call you. It will shine a certain way, and you have a responsibility to pick that. If you don’t, you’re turning away the gift of the Creator, and so it may not grow again. The same way with what happens in the park. The land is getting to the place it doesn’t know us anymore, because it’s like people are turning away their gifts. And the things that need to be harvested are not being harvested. So the park misses us as much as we miss the park.*

This participant explicitly describes the land as having agency and interacting in a purposeful manner with her while she gathers sweetgrass. Land-use practices then become predicated upon social rules of interaction as much as they are guidelines for maintaining environmental health. This does not suggest a lack of concern or understanding about the sustainable use of the land. As another elder declares, “*we have sense enough, those of us who do these kinds of things, we have sense enough not to go and harvest every plant available...You always leave something to propagate itself*” (23).

These rules of interaction between an individual and the land have evolved over the course of generations living and practicing within the parkland.

The previous participant’s claim that the parkland “*misses*” the people, explicitly suggests a familiarity or association similar to familial or kinships relations. By identifying an affiliation, or kinship with the land, this woman considers herself as a “*part of the land.*” Obligations to interact in particular ways in order to maintain a
proper relationship with the land are predicated upon a reciprocal understanding between herself and the land. In this case, the practice of gathering sweetgrass serves to fulfill a cultural responsibility to accept a gift of the land, while harvesting and interacting with the land serves to maintain its health. Current park prohibitions against this sort of interaction with the land, such as gathering sweetgrass, have long taken their toll, to the degree that this participant believes “the park misses the people.”

The various roles that the mountains play in the well-being of the Blackfeet people, and the ways in which they are described in participant narratives, seem to imbue the parkland with a form of sentience. This perception of the mountains as maintaining relationships with the Blackfeet people through gifts of subsistence, knowledge, and power, frames Blackfeet relationships with the parkland on mutually social terms. The principle of reciprocity common to Blackfeet relationships among themselves is also a principle by which the Blackfeet relate to the land and its various entities. Blackfeet responsibility to practice in particular ways derives not only from a responsibility to cultural tradition, but to the entities of the parkland themselves.7

4. The Importance of Practices

Blackfeet relationships with the parkland most obviously manifest themselves through practices, which have been defined as those activities which serve to fulfill cultural, spiritual, and material needs, and in so doing, also strengthen meanings and identity. Besides the obvious material benefits certain practices provide, practices also unlock the less tangible resources of the parkland. This is evident with gathering

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7 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 4, 7, 14-17, 19, 23-26, 37.
practices which maintain ecological knowledge of significant plants and roots, and spiritual practices which entreat the powers of the land to provide power, knowledge, and insight.

Practices are often performed in family groups and so become a forum for introducing and transmitting cultural knowledge and understanding to others. These activities then not only spread and maintain knowledge, but also preserve it for the future as well. Practices serve as an explicit link between the past and the present, uniting Blackfeet people of the past, present, and future, within one unique cultural identity.

Knowledge, Sacred Power, and Practices

The mountains contain an accumulation of cultural knowledge and understanding which is accessible through various kinds of practices. Much of this knowledge is unique to the parkland, as the Blackfeet traditionally used different plants and material resources found nowhere else in their traditional homeland. Reeves and Peacock (2001) identify over 80 plant species extant within the national park that were traditionally used as food, medicine, and for spiritual purposes. The authors indicate that most of the knowledge associated with these plants is retained by elders who remember the experiences and accounts of their parents and grandparents. Since the establishment of the national park, the harvesting of these materials has been substantially diminished. The sense of the subsistence value of the parkland still remains strong, however, even if younger Blackfeet are less informed about the specific knowledge the mountains provide.

Besides providing for subsistence, medicinal, and spiritual values, the practice of plant gathering also helps to preserve the knowledge associated with the plants and the
practices themselves. Knowledge of important plant species, their properties and their use, and how, where, and when to find the plants themselves, is taught through the reenactment of practices. As this elderly Blackfeet woman recalls, her mother’s practice of gathering medicinal roots required special knowledge:

> When we got in the summertime about now, we’d go up into the mountains over on that side to gather roots, and my mother took care of that. And those were roots for if we had colds. She knew what they looked like, she knew by their smell, and after awhile we knew what to look for. 5

This woman indicates that she and the other children eventually learned this ecological knowledge through repeated practice. This knowledge has since been lost, however, as she explains, “I couldn’t go in there and show you now; I don’t remember it’s been so long.” This statement reflects the reality that knowledge preserved through practice and oral history must be continually reenacted and retold to ensure its survival.

Practices are also a way to acquire sacred power associated with spiritual ceremonies and ritual fasts. What a person may gain through these practices may be difficult for non-Blackfeet to understand. Practices are often explicitly linked to mountain summits, because, as this participant describes, “You’re closer to the grandfathers, the Creator, and the sun” (19). These places are where individuals go to “get [their] powers, say, to run [their] sweat lodge to heal people; to be the medicine men” (19).

An ability to access these sacred places is a fundamental dimension of Blackfeet spiritual well-being. As this participant explains:

> You look in our history, whenever trouble came to our people, whenever there was uncertainty, the men would go. I’m not saying every man, but certain men would go up and they’d pray and they would fast. Hollywood calls it a vision quest, but they would just go, because they needed to hear from the Creator, they wanted to know, how do we get out of this? 9
To begin to understand the power of the vision quest, an individual can envision what this practice entails. Not only is a person closer to infinite space atop a mountain summit, but within the parkland, one stands before an unimaginable scene. Atop Chief Mountain for example, the plains unroll 5,000 feet below for hundreds of vacant, visible miles east. The horizon bends along either periphery. Directly west is Glacier’s tallest peak, and a sea of shorter summits line the valleys. The summit of Chief is perhaps 500 meters long, but extremely narrow, and less than a few meters wide in places. To come down after a three-day, solitary fast, from this fiercely windblown place at the edge between the plains and the mountains, is to reenter an old world with new eyes. This is perhaps the power of spiritual practice atop the mountain.8

The Significance of Place in Practice

Practice is often explicitly linked to specific sites, to the extent that the same practice in a different location may embody very different meanings. This is particularly the case for Native American religious practices which are generally linked to a sacred geography, where specific geographic sites and features play sacred functions in Native worldviews. As this younger participant explains, his spiritual practice requires a distinct ritual pattern:

*Chief Mountain is a spiritual place. You have to be worthy to go up to Chief Mountain. See, I’m starting over here on XXXX. That’s a long way away, a long way. But in time, in time when the old ones think that I’m ready, then I’ll be able to go to Chief Mountain.* 18

8 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 9, 12, 13, 18, 20, 21, 27, 28, 31, 37, 40.
Chief Mountain is the most sacred place in the Blackfeet geography, and by virtue of its power, this participant may only approach its summit upon reaching an adequate level of spiritual preparation. This participant indicates that there are other specific places to which he must journey first, suggesting that the locations of this individual’s spiritual practices are not arbitrarily chosen. Each new site symbolizes his growth in cultural identity and spirituality; each site embodies a distinct significance and cultural meaning.

Places are also significant because of their physical geography, particularly their elevation, which as this participant describes, has significant influence on the character of the land’s resources:

*We have usual, customary places, or places we could go back to where we have been. One of the things that my family did was they gathered…I have a sister who still does, she’s an herbalist. And so collecting some of the plants that grow in alpine areas are some of the most powerful, just because of where they are and their survival. 27*

Plants from lower elevations would be less effective medicines, as the power of the plant is embodied in a heartiness born of alpine altitudes. Places also play more mundane roles as locales which provide comfort and security in their familiarity. The “usual” places are significant to this participant precisely because they are repeatedly visited. Also important to this participant is the knowledge of other familiar places that could be re-visited if the need or desire ever arose.9

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9 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 3, 8, 9, 18-21, 27, 31, 34, 36, 37, 40-43, 59.
5. Sense of Belonging

Blackfeet relationships with the parkland are characterized by strong emotional attachments to the mountains, both as individuals and as a collective. Participants described the mountains in terms of the hope, pride, consolation, and protection they provide the Blackfeet. Many of these descriptions reflect a familiarity and association as between family members. This tone of familiarity, even among those who entered the parkland infrequently, reflects a basic sense of affiliation and belonging as though part of an extended lineage. This affiliation, based on the length of the Blackfeet historical presence in the area, is essentially taken for granted in Blackfeet narratives. This sense of belonging is to suggest that many participants feel as though the Blackfeet are inextricably bound to the parkland, whether they set foot in the place or not.

Despite a general sentiment that the federal government will always control the parkland and that subsistence use rights to the parkland will never be fully recognized, participants were unwavering in their sense of an essential Blackfeet association with the parkland. Speaking as for his people, a younger participant affirms that Blackfeet “realize the land is still a part of us. One way or another, it’s always going to be there for us, whether we ever get the land back or not (15).”

For many Blackfeet, the parkland is a dramatic, consistent backdrop in their daily lives. The first thing people often do in the morning is “look to the west” to see the mountains. Through the understanding that this same view was often enjoyed by one’s ancestors, a connection with the past is made, and a hope for the future is stirred. As this participant remarks, “The buffalo are gone. Our way of life is gone. But maybe there’s hope because those mountains are still here” (9). His hope resides in this one
consistency: While so much of what used to link Blackfeet through the generations has disappeared, the mountains still remain a consistent feature of Blackfeet lives. Within the mountains lies an accumulation of cultural knowledge and understanding which can still be accessed. Hope lies in the mountains’ semblance of permanence within a sea of historically difficult change for the Blackfeet people.

The mountains serve as a reminder of what is often idealized among some Blackfeet, particularly the elders, as a better time. As this Blackfeet elder describes, “I always have that feeling of how fortunate we are to have this, where we live, where our people roamed at one time. It belonged to them, and they were free” (17). As a symbol of the Blackfeet past, the mountains certainly represent a more idyllic, less complicated time. This woman’s vision of the past is also markedly political, for while the mountains may represent a sovereign past, they currently reflect a contrasting state of affairs, where both ownership (the mountains “belonged to them”) and sovereignty (“and they were free”), are now deeply contested.

Another participant was explicit about the protective role the mountains play in preserving Blackfeet culture, claiming that “the tie is even stronger today than it was before, because that’s our last refuge” (9). This remark reflects how the parkland simultaneously represents loss even while it symbolizes hope. To describe the mountains as the “last refuge” of the Blackfeet, is to attach great significance, power, and hope to the mountains, while also indicating that representing the last refuge, there is much that has already been lost. Beneath these conflicting symbols of hope and loss, however, lies a fundamental comfort and security undeterred by the influences of contested histories and political struggles. This basic identification with the mountains as a place of origins,
a place of sacred power and knowledge, and as a protector of the people, remains steadily intact. As this participant remembers:

*What one of my elders told me when I was real young, at dark we’d be out in the country, and we’d be scared, and the background would be just mountains all over. And the first place we’d try to run is away from the mountains. And he’d always tell us, ‘No, if you’re ever scared, go to the mountains.’*

Historically, the mountains provided safety as a buffer from tribes to the west, and were a definitive boundary to Blackfeet territory through which few people passed. The feet of the mountains were also a refuge through the harsh winters of the eastern plains. To be instructed to go towards the mountains has a definite historical precedent. For Blackfeet today, the safety and consolation the mountains provide has evolved into a different context. The mountains serve as a cultural touchstone for the Blackfeet, a reminder and a repository of the things that were. For many participants, the mountains represent what is unique and noble about Blackfeet identity, and Blackfeet pride in ‘their’ mountains is fueled not only by their historical association with the landscape, but also by the interest shown from the outside world in Glacier National Park.

As one participant declared earlier, “*You can’t talk about Glacier without talking about the Blackfeet. Glacier is the Blackfeet*” (9). Participant narratives often describe the mountains in ways which make the Blackfeet people seem inseparable from its geography. They have always inhabited this place and have always used these mountains. More importantly, they believe they will always inhabit this place, and that this connection will forever remain. When asked to describe what the mountains mean to
the Blackfeet, this participant’s response reflects this fundamental understanding, stating, “Blackfeet belong to the mountains (28).”\textsuperscript{10}

6. Conclusion

Blackfeet relationships with the mountains are quite diverse, emphasizing different locations, activities, family histories, and varying in their quality and character across the tribe. Despite this diversity of individual experience, Blackfeet regularly identify with the parkland landscape as part of a collective. This cultural trait conceptually frames individual Blackfeet relationships with the parkland within a larger historical and cultural legacy. Individual relationships therefore share many common meanings, symbols, and values, all of which strengthen a sense of collective cultural identity.

Blackfeet cultural identification with the parkland is also strengthened through the reenactment of practices which link individuals to their heritage and its legacy. Beyond this symbolic role, practices also serve distinct material, cultural, and spiritual needs. Practices also serve as a primary means of preserving cultural knowledge and understanding, as well as the knowledge of how to correctly practice, for example, the knowledge to identify, locate, harvest, and prepare a specific medicinal plant. Practices are explicitly linked to a sense of responsibility which extends beyond personal identity and the preservation of culture, to the entities of the parkland including the land itself.

Underscoring the process and character of Blackfeet relationships with the parkland is a profound sense of integration between the Blackfeet people and the landscape, such that many Blackfeet view themselves as conceptually inseparable from the parkland.

\textsuperscript{10} Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 3-5, 19, 30, 36, 37, 39.
Rather than reflecting notions of property and ownership, Blackfeet narratives describe an association with the mountains which suggests a belonging, each to the other. While this indicates the emotional attachment many Blackfeet feel towards the mountains, belonging suggests an association even more fundamental, as though one could simply not exist without the other. This is also a reciprocal understanding, such that as the mountains are as an essential part of Blackfeet lives, so the Blackfeet are essential to the mountains. As a previous participant described, when Blackfeet practices are constrained and presence disappears, the parkland “misses the people” (27).

The roles that the mountains play in the lives of the Blackfeet, as a source of hope, pride, and protection, indicate the strong attachment most participants have for the parkland. Blackfeet relationships with the national park institution are directly shaped and influenced by the way these significant qualities and dimensions are constrained or promoted by the park. Blackfeet relationships with the parkland shape and influence why Blackfeet support or criticize certain park policies and regulations, how they interact with park personnel, and how Blackfeet envision their future with Glacier National Park.

In addition to the primary role that the parkland plays in Blackfeet relationships with the park, Blackfeet interpretations describing the loss of this land also weigh heavily in these relationships. The Blackfeet historical narrative is characterized by a prominent theme of land and cultural dispossession by the federal government, of which the national park is often framed as the most visible and tangible symbol. The next chapter serves to describe this historical narrative through Blackfeet perspectives, providing an alternative interpretation of the events surrounding the establishment of the park, and subsequent challenges to park authority and its control of the parkland.
Chapter 5: The Blackfeet Historical Narrative

1. Introduction

Blackfeet narratives describing the parkland’s meanings, symbols, and its significance to Blackfeet identity, subscribe to a series of cultural premises, or “logics” (Knowles and Collett, 1989) which provide the ‘truths’ around which the bulk of these narratives are built. For example, Blackfeet narratives describing claims to the parkland are often framed within the Blackfeet historical and cultural legacy, and are therefore legitimized by a primacy of habitation. These narratives are also framed by a sense of ‘belonging,’ alluding to an association with the landscape which transcends Western notions of property and ownership.

Similarly, Blackfeet narratives describing the history of Glacier National Park, interaction with the federal government, and with Anglo-American culture, are also framed by their own set of “logics.” The Blackfeet historical narrative is largely one of dispossession, dominated by the premise that the federal government will do whatever necessary to ensure its control of Indian Country. This logic is prominently supported by the government’s controversial legal interpretation of the terms of the 1895 Agreement, and the loss of Blackfeet rights within Glacier National Park. As a form of counter-narrative, Blackfeet oral history disputes these events with alternative interpretations of the terms of the 1895 Agreement. The Blackfeet historical narrative thus also serves to sustain the legitimacy and validity of Blackfeet claims to the parkland, as well as an alternative interpretation of government actions than that described in official park history.
These historical interpretations are internally referenced by Blackfeet in their encounters with NPS personnel, and when weighing the park’s value against its cost to the Blackfeet people. Blackfeet relationships with the national park are therefore heavily influenced by Blackfeet historical interpretations and narratives of the events surrounding the park’s establishment. Blackfeet narratives also describe a much broader historical context of land and cultural dispossession by the federal government when describing the park and its effects on the Blackfeet people.

This chapter describes the Blackfeet historical narrative by weaving together various accounts by research participants. Many of the events described are a part of the written historical record, but Blackfeet oral history often emphasizes particular events which park history only cursorily notes. In the opinion of most participants, the effects of many of these events on Blackfeet well-being are either ignored or downplayed by the park’s historical narrative. While Glacier National Park may have helped symbolically coronate the strength of a young and prosperous nation, to Blackfeet, the park symbolizes a more difficult time of physical displacement and cultural upheaval. These alternative interpretations are thought of as hardly visible within the park’s own recorded history, as this participant observes:

*If you go into St. Mary's [visitor center] or Two Medicine [ranger station], somewhere around there, they’ll have books about Blackfeet, history about Blackfeet. But it doesn’t say, it doesn’t have the treaty there, you know, how the park was signed over to the government. It doesn’t have that. The real rights, you know?* 15

This historical narrative describes more than just the significant events of the Blackfeet experience; it focuses most heavily on three primary claims related to the national park. These three primary claims contend that: 1) Blackfeet should have
subsistence rights to the parkland as described in the terms of the 1895 Agreement; 2) the park boundary should be adjusted to address not only the original terms of the agreement, but also the government’s active manipulation of the current boundary; and 3) federal jurisdiction ended with the expiration of the lease of the Ceded Strip, which has been incorrectly interpreted by the government as a sale.

To describe this Blackfeet historical perspective, pieces of participant narratives are embedded within the broader historical record. From this perspective, it becomes obvious that Blackfeet do not view the national park from the same historical tradition from which official park history emerges. The Blackfeet historical narrative is, by contrast, marked by great upheaval and loss. This participant describes these primary themes and their contemporary relevance in Blackfeet lives:

"We always say we were colonized, Christianized, I mean, we were completely made over to what we were not. And that adjustment has never been easy. And we’re still experiencing the fallout from it. I mean, people say, oh, that’s a cop out, that was a long time ago. But no, those stories are still being told in the living room of the family home here in Browning. So you’re never going to get away from that. We call it ‘dragging our bones.’ We’re still dragging our bones around." 14

This participant strongly suggests the influence this history may still have on Blackfeet and their relationships with the national park. As a highly visible, yet largely faceless government agency, the NPS is a convenient and accessible target for these Blackfeet frustrations.

\textit{2. A History of Land and Cultural Dispossession}

Blackfeet narratives describing the history between their people and Glacier National Park often begin in the late 19th century. Narratives describe a tribe weakened
by hunger and disease, a diminished population, and a shrinking land base. The tribe’s steady decline eventually resulted in the sale of reservation lands to secure some form of income to buy food and other necessities. A prevailing sentiment among older participants holds these land sales to be strongly coerced by a government eager to acquire Indian land. As this tribal leader explains, the 1895 Agreement which eventually led to the establishment of Glacier National Park was less a sale, and more a cession to government interests and the pressure of Anglo civilization:

I shouldn’t say sold. That was forcibly taken. It might look like on paper that, oh, both parties agreed. But again, that persistence of the white man constantly coming, saying, ‘No, this is in the best interest of the tribe. This is what we’re going to do. This is how it needs to be done.’

The “persistence of the white man” and his attempts to actively shape Blackfeet lives through treaty-making, officially began when the Blackfeet’s expansive territory was first demarcated by the Lame Bull Treaty of 1855. This treaty designated territories for a number of Plains Indian tribes, but did not establish strict boundaries between them, recognizing the existing communal hunting grounds which blurred the boundaries of these territories (Farr, 2001). Blackfeet tribal territory ran from the Continental Divide, east to the confluence of the Missouri and Milk Rivers. The treaty was a measure by the US government to secure a safe westward passage for the railroad line, as well as for a growing stream of white settlers through potentially hostile Indian territory (Kappler, 1904).

Expanding populations on the plains led to increased conflict between Indians and settlers, which in turn led to skirmishes between the Blackfeet and the US military. Conflict culminated in the Baker Massacre on the Marias River in 1870, when more than 200 Blackfeet women, children, and elders were killed in a misplaced retaliatory strike by
US soldiers against the wrong Blackfeet band (Jackson, 2000). This event is still significant within the narratives of older Blackfeet participants as a lasting symbol of government aggression against the Blackfeet.

Blackfeet territory designated by the Lame Bull Treaty was later shrunk and bounded in 1865, as the government sought to acquire more Indian land, and to eliminate the nomadism of Plains tribes by confining them to reservations (Hertzberg, 1971). These dual motives of land and cultural dispossession largely framed government interactions with Indian tribes in the years ahead. Assimilating Indians into the dominant Anglo culture was not only seen as an inevitable result of American expansion, but also as the quickest way to ease the complete absorption of Indian land and resources into the growing American nation (Hertzberg, 1971).

The General Allotment Act of 1887 embodied this dual mandate as it sought to break tribes of communal property patterns and to further remove land from the possession of tribes (Washburn, 1975). Specific parcels of Blackfeet Reservation land were deeded to tribal members, and the “excess” land left over was then sold to non-Indians. The geographic size of the Blackfeet Reservation had already been significantly reduced by an Executive Order in 1873, and again by a unilateral Act of Congress in 1874. Through the Allotment Act, the Blackfeet eventually lost over half of reservation land to non-Blackfeet, and this ratio of non-Indian land ownership remains intact on the Blackfeet Reservation today (Samek, 1986).

Besides restructuring property patterns among tribes, the government sought a more complete transformation of tribal cultural patterns, language, and belief systems. This
gesture is characterized by this participant as perhaps well-intentioned, yet ultimately misguided and destructive:

So they [the government] want to show them [the Blackfeet] how to live well, trying to help them by civilizing them. But little do they know that that simple way of life or that primitive way of life that they see them practicing is [the Blackfeet’s] own. And if that’s the way [the Blackfeet] did things, and they’re happy, [the government] should have left it alone, but they didn’t. So then they went to try to save them. And in saving them, they destroyed a bunch of things along the way: the culture, the language, traditions that help that sense of survival, having to do this and that to live on the land, and all the knowledge that goes along with that; they’ve destroyed a lot of that. 12

Combined with the pressure of federal land and cultural dispossession, was an increasing Anglo presence and influence in the region. Despite the trade this brought the Blackfeet, it also resulted in periodic epidemics of smallpox and the health and social problems of the whiskey trade. The near-extinction of the buffalo due to extensive over-hunting for the trade in buffalo robes had arguably the most far-reaching and devastating effect on the Blackfeet people. By 1883, the buffalo herds had completely vanished from the Blackfeet Reservation, and along with them, the primary source of food, clothes, and shelter for the tribe.

With the loss of the buffalo and their primary subsistence resource, the Blackfeet were literally at the mercy of the federal government. In response to this staggering loss, the government attempted to introduce farming to the Blackfeet. This was viewed as an effective means to both feed the tribe and develop a self-sustaining economy. Also implicit, was the introduction of an appropriate, ‘civilized’ occupation to the tribe. Agricultural efforts were stymied, however, by the arid land of the reservation and by Blackfeet difficulties of adopting a foreign way of life (Rosier, 1999).
The routine delay, and frequent failure of the government to deliver food rations guaranteed by the Lame Bull Treaty during the winters of 1883 through 1885, compounded the failure of farming (Foley, 1974). During this time, over one-quarter of the tribe’s population starved to death. Once a population of over 15,000, the tribe now hovered near 2,000 (Reeves and Peacock, 2001). In 1886, in order to address desperate conditions on the reservation, the tribe agreed to sell the Sweetgrass Hills and the lands east of Cut Bank Creek. Nearly ten years later, money from that sale was running out, forcing tribal leaders to inquire about the government interest shown in the parkland:

_The Blackfeet had two starvation winters before we lost the park. And we always say they literally starved us for our park. They did. And that’s something that we all are actually told by our elders, that they starved us out to get the park from us. We were weak. We needed food. We needed money. It was like, okay, we’re at a breaking point. Take it._ 14

As this participant’s explanation shows, Blackfeet animosity toward the national park is embedded within a context which supersedes the park’s designation itself. Blackfeet claims against Glacier National Park are often framed from within this larger context, even if claims appear to be only concerned with specific park policies and prohibitions. When hearing the angry commentary of his Blackfeet associates against the park, one participant remarked that it was difficult to tell if “_it’s the park service they’re mad at, or just the government_” (2).

The “_breaking point_” and the subsequent sale, was of land originally eyed by white prospectors who convinced the government to purchase the land in order to open the area to mining interests (see Keller and Turek, 1998). The Blackfeet were likely well aware of the increasing presence of white prospectors in the mountains of their territory, and the sale may have been a means of compensation for what the tribe had little power to stop.
Regardless, lack of money on the reservation forced Blackfeet leaders to inquire about a sale.

Blackfeet leaders approached George Bird Grinnell, former Audubon Society president, editor of *Field and Stream* magazine, and ‘friend’ of the Blackfeet, to aid them in the negotiation. Grinnell had become an avid proponent of designating the mountainous portion of Blackfeet land as a national park. He believed there was no mineral wealth in the mountains and saw an opportunity to make his dream a reality through the sale (Keller and Turek, 1998). Grinnell also believed that the American Indian was a “vanishing race,” and might only be saved through assimilation into the dominant culture (Grinnell, 1907). This could be more effectively accomplished by severing the Blackfeet from their traditional cultural practices. While not explicitly documented as such, the loss of the mountains and all their related traditional activities was likely seen as a means to this end. While Grinnell may have believed he was working in the best interests of the tribe, his name is often disparaged by many modern-day Blackfeet who view his legacy as one of betrayal. As this participant explains:

> I have a lot of questionable feelings, certainly more negative than positive, about George Bird Grinnell, who posed as the friend of the Indian, and made that term an empty term forever. And while his “friends” were starving, here’s this super wealthy man standing by. And instead of saying, ‘Why don’t I go buy you some groceries?’ he’s saying, ‘Why don’t you sell some land?’

The land Grinnell sought to acquire became part of an 800,000 acre piece of the western end of the reservation, also known as the Ceded Strip. A large piece of that land was eventually designated as part of Glacier National Park, fifteen years later. This land was purchased by the federal government from the Blackfeet for $1.5 million dollars, after a three-day negotiation process which produced the 1895 Land Agreement.
steady pressure, not only of the protracted meeting, but of systematic dispossession and
displacement, is reflected in the words of Blackfeet chief, White Calf, spoken to
government negotiators:

Chief Mountain is my head. Now my head is cut off. The mountains have been
my last refuge. We have been driven here and now we are settled…We don’t
want our Great Father to ask for anything more. We will have to send you away.
(Senate Document 118, 1896)

3. Blackfeet Rights and the 1895 Agreement

The most contentious aspect of the 1895 Agreement remains a question of Blackfeet
rights to the resources of the parkland. Blackfeet oral history describes their leaders as
never intending to agree to terms which might potentially alienate their people from the
parkland. To address this concern, the leaders made subsistence rights a primary
provision within the language of the agreement. It was an explicit way for the Blackfeet,
using the government’s language and terminology, to retain rights of access to the
parkland. It was also an implicit way of retaining rights to traditional relationships with
the parkland. Blackfeet rights were reserved in the following passage of the 1895
Agreement:

Provided, That said Indians shall have, and do hereby reserve to themselves, the
right to go upon any portion of the lands hereby conveyed so long as the same
shall remain public lands of the United States, and to cut and remove therefrom
wood and timber for agency and school purposes, and for their personal uses for
houses, fences and all other domestic purposes: And provided further, That the
said Indians hereby reserve and retain the right to hunt upon said lands and to fish
in the streams thereof so long as the same shall remain public lands of the United
States under and in accordance with the provisions of the game and fish laws of
the State of Montana. (Kappler, 1904, p. 606)

The language of the document reflects Anglo understandings of potential Blackfeet
subsistence and livelihood needs, and does not necessarily indicate that Blackfeet leaders
only sought to protect these specific rights. The right to fish, for example, reflects the government’s hand in crafting the language of the provision, as eating fish was a traditional Blackfeet cultural taboo (Reeves and Peacock, 2001). Other dimensions of Blackfeet relationships with the parkland, including the gathering of medicinal and sacred plants, and practicing ritual fasts and ceremonies, are not recorded. Keller and Turek (1998) suggest, however, that the inclusion of “spiritual” rights would have required culturally inappropriate discussions with outsiders about sacred matters. They also suggest that these Blackfeet concerns may have been deliberately hidden from government negotiators, given the pressures upon the Blackfeet to forsake cultural traditions and begin a process of cultural assimilation.

Regardless of the language, for fifteen years following the agreement, Blackfeet reserved rights were neither questioned nor challenged, and Blackfeet practices in the parkland presumably proceeded as usual. The parkland opened up to mining interests which, as Grinnell had predicted, shortly went bust. When Glacier National Park was designated in 1910, enabling legislation for the national park was silent on the issue of Blackfeet reserved rights. The tribe was not consulted over the establishment of a national park, or what that would likely mean to Blackfeet livelihoods and well-being (Presti, 2005). As this participant declares, “Along [the government’s] way, they forgot who they started dealing with. They plum forgot the Blackfeet. And they left us way behind. And those rights are still there” (12). A prevalent theme from the historical narrative is the federal government’s tendency to forget, or ignore, Blackfeet needs, concerns, and most significantly their rights. Blackfeet belief that “those rights are still there,” has fueled numerous conflicts between Blackfeet and the NPS.
In October of 1932, four Blackfeet were arrested by park rangers for trespassing in a closed area and possessing firearms with the intent to hunt. The four men contended that they were merely exercising their reserved rights. The Blackfeet were found guilty by the US District Court in Great Falls, and the court’s decision was later sustained on appeal. This ruling served to officially terminate Blackfeet rights, and was based upon the court’s claim that the lands in question ceased to be “public land” once it had become a national park and was no longer “subject to sale or other disposal under general law” (Ashby, 1985, p. 54). Blackfeet had been guaranteed subsistence rights for as long as the lands in question remained “public lands of the United States” (Kappler, 1904, p. 606). The court also determined that the “Blackfeet had failed to establish the extent to which they used the reserved privileges from 1895 to 1910” and had therefore forfeited these rights (Ashby, 1985, p. 50).

Conflict over these rights receded into the background for decades until 1973, when Blackfeet tribal member Woodrow Kipp refused to pay the park entrance fee, citing a right to freely access the parkland based upon the terms of the 1895 Agreement. He was arrested, and the case went before the US District Court of Great Falls. In early 1974, the charges against Kipp were dismissed in a ruling which stated that Blackfeet rights retained in the 1895 Agreement had not been extinguished by the national park’s creation. The judge argued that there was no reason to believe that the Blackfeet leaders of 1895 understood their rights to be in jeopardy as long as the land remained a part of the United States (Ashby, 1985). Despite the significance of this interpretation, the only right awarded to the Blackfeet was the right of free entry into the national park, as that was the only right challenged by Kipp.
A few weeks later, three tribal members sought to challenge prohibitions against the other specifically reserved rights. George Kipp II fired a gun to challenge the prohibition against hunting, Charles Momberg, Jr. fished in a closed area, and Darrell Momberg cut a limb from a live tree. While the first two pled no contest and received suspended sentences, Momberg pled not guilty, and was taken before the same judge who had acquitted Woodrow Kipp a few months earlier. This time however, Judge Donald Smith concluded that the tree had been cut to test the treaty rather than to take wood for personal or agency use, as described in the 1895 Agreement (Ashby, 1985). Momberg was found guilty and fined $1.00. Judge Smith had also only recently become aware of the judgment by the 1935 Court of Claims, which had previously extinguished Blackfeet reserved rights to the parkland. With his ruling, Smith officially reaffirmed this precedent decision (Presti, 2005). Despite the apparent contradiction in legal opinions between the Kipp and Momberg cases, Blackfeet have not challenged these decisions. Many believe they will simply be found guilty, regardless of the validity of their claims (Presti, 2005). The right of free entry into the park, however, remains intact.

The perceived legitimacy of Blackfeet claims to the parkland is further supported by the perceived illegitimacy of these controversial legal interpretations. As one participant remarked, “I think it’s just how the judge reworded it, you know, how he made it sound. But I feel that since that’s in our treaty, it should be part of our right” (15). Another participant claimed that the struggle over the reserved rights is basically a “fairness issue” (8). Another states that to recognize and respect Blackfeet claims to the parkland would be to “respect the integral spirit of the early agreement” (11).
Most participants said they had never read the terms of the 1895 Agreement, instead, they understood its provisions through the context of Blackfeet oral history. While the oral transmission of history may lack the technical precision of the written word in preserving the exact language and detail of information, written history is not necessarily a more accurate interpretation of those same events. Nor is the written record infallible, as words can be omitted and inserted, and the meanings of words can be deliberately manipulated and interpreted in particular ways. Many Blackfeet feel that the written record has been used to dispossess the tribe of its land and resource wealth. They claim that written treaties were either deliberately interpreted to the government’s advantage, or that Blackfeet leaders were convinced by government negotiators to agree to terms they did not fully understand:

_They [the government] are trying to convince us that our leaders a long time ago, fully understood written words and that they [Blackfeet leaders] put them down. And the government changed them. And they interpret them today to their advantage, to the government’s advantage, and so we don’t have any rights._ 12

This participant’s explicit claim of government duplicity is another primary theme of Blackfeet narratives. Suspicion and distrust of the federal government was, to varying degrees, prevalent among most participant narratives. The two other primary claims to the parkland concerning the park boundary and lease, only perpetuate this mistrust because they also counter the prevailing government interpretation of the 1895 Agreement.

4. A Disputed Boundary

Blackfeet suspicion of the government is nowhere more obvious than in narratives describing the park’s eastern boundary with the Blackfeet reservation. This participant’s
statement echoes similar responses by nearly all research participants, saying, “We got cheated on that...I think that if they had given us, if they’d been fair and square and given us peak to peak, people wouldn’t be griping so much. But they cut us way down” (11).

The text of the 1895 Agreement describes the eastern boundary of the Ceded Strip as “beginning at a point on the northern boundary of the reservation due north from the summit of Chief Mountain, and running thence south to said summit” and so on (Kappler, 1904, p. 606.). The somewhat vague description of the original agreement makes challenging the current boundary legally futile, although Blackfeet oral history is decidedly consistent with the claim that the boundary should legally be from “peak to peak.” With frank certainty, this participant declares:

*I'm sure you're aware of when the line was put in up there, originally it was from peak to peak then it was moved down, well, I don't know where it stands now, if the park's ever paid for where it goes from where the line is now up to peak to peak. There are old records that show where the original line is.* 8

Participants regularly disputed the current park boundary in their narratives about the park. Throughout the course of the interviews, no other topic was more frequently raised by the participants themselves, than this nearly universal claim. “Peak to peak” is a catchphrase among the Blackfeet, symbolizing the duplicity of the government, in addition to its claim about the incorrect park boundary. While participants described variations in their understanding of the 1895 Agreement, the intent of their leaders, and the ways in which the government had deceived the Blackfeet, that which remained consistent was this essential claim:

*They bought the peak of the rock, nothing else. There were no other territorial grounds to go with that, because they [Blackfeet leaders] knew they [the government] were looking for that substance, that yellow rock. So they [Blackfeet leaders] portrayed that they just wanted to give them [the government] the peak of the rock because the tribe couldn’t eat the rock. So they gave the government*
the right to use the rock. But they kept all the other rights, but down the line the interpretation was misused and misinterpreted. 24

This participant explicitly links pre-park mining interests with the terms of the 1895 Agreement. Glacier National Park, like other national parks of the era, was established only once it had been determined to be economically worthless to extractive industries (Runte, 1997). This participant’s argument that mining interests drove the sale and so also shaped the terms of the boundary, corroborates the claim of “peak to peak.”

Following from the “peak to peak” claim is the notion that “there were no other territorial grounds to go with that” and so the Blackfeet “kept all the other rights” to the land and resources beneath the peaks.

This participant’s accusation that the government “misused and misinterpreted” the terms of the original agreement reflects a general suspicion and distrust on the reservation of government actions. This is also reflected in a widespread belief among research participants that the park has deliberately and systematically encroached onto Blackfeet land over the years, gradually altering the originally surveyed boundary. The NPS did once actively seek to expand the park’s boundary significantly eastward in order to protect wintering animals from Blackfeet hunters (Keller and Turek, 1998). This historically documented pressure upon the tribe to relinquish more reservation land for the national park indicates a motive for manipulating the boundary. It also suggests a historical origin for the pervasive belief among Blackfeet that this has already occurred. Participant descriptions of government deception over the boundary are often surprisingly specific, and ultimately, verifiable:

You can see where there’s the line cut in the trees and it’s got some growth in it, because the trees are shorter. Then you move about another half a mile, mile or so out, and then there’s another one that’s newer because the trees are shorter.
And then there’s another one where there’s just grass and little saplings. And then there’s the new boundary where there’s just nothing because they just made it ten years ago. And you can see where it’s been moved. And they keep moving it. 22

Presti (2005, p. 112) also quotes a Blackfeet cultural leader who claims that rows of concrete barriers, the old boundary markers, were discovered years ago after a forest fire. These markers were much further to the west of the current boundary. Other participants of this research talked about how “the line was moved way down” (11) from the peaks, how the NPS is “pushing the boundary over...trying to make our land smaller,” (17) and how “a lot of the old people claim that they’ve all, Grinnell, his Audubon friends and whoever, moved the stakes” (14).

No participant was pressured to prove anything they said during interviews, and so perhaps these claims were just rumors participants had heard and enjoyed recounting to an outsider interested in the park. While these claims may or may not be true, the belief that any boundary below the mountains is illegitimate, is a primary theme of Blackfeet narratives of the park, and remains a significant source of tension for some Blackfeet. As this participant explains, “That’s still a sore spot with people, especially the old men. You talk to them, and they still rave about that peak to peak thing. Even my old dad, right to his dying day, was always complaining about that peak to peak deal” (14).

These sentiments emphasize the pervasive influence of the historical narrative within the Blackfeet community, and the emotive power of Blackfeet oral history, even concerning events which happened nearly a century ago.
5. Blackfeet Sense of Ownership

Blackfeet historical narratives not only serve to support Blackfeet claims and interpretations, but also to undermine the legitimacy of the national park, further strengthening the Blackfeet position. Some participants accused government negotiators of exploiting a cultural divide between themselves and the Blackfeet by deliberately misinterpreting Blackfeet intent in the legal language of the 1895 Agreement. They indicate that historically, Blackfeet never recognized private property and ownership in the way their Anglo-American counterparts at the negotiation did. They contend that their leaders never intended to sell the land and transfer its ownership to another party, because their leaders couldn’t conceive of a relationship to the parkland in which ownership, or more appropriately, ‘belonging,’ could be bought or sold. They claim their leaders only intended to allow the government to share the resources of the parkland, and never would have agreed to terms which could potentially restrict Blackfeet access and use.

Consequently, many participants believe that the Blackfeet only sold rights of access to the mountainous region of the parkland, and that this was a temporary arrangement. This is reflected in a widespread belief that the government was granted a 99-year lease; which was also less frequently described as a 50 or 100-year lease. Official government documentation of the 1895 Agreement does not include mention of a lease, and as this participant recalls from conversations among his elders, “I don’t know how it came about, but for some reason, years ago when they would talk about the park, they’d always say that the park has a 99-year lease” (9).
This notion of selling access to land rather than the land itself is also predicated upon the argument that ‘selling land,’ or transferring ownership, would have made little cultural sense to Blackfeet leaders of the time. As this participant argues:

*A long time ago, different concepts that we have today weren’t existent in my ancestors’ minds, and one of them is ‘I own this piece of land’; ‘There’s my border right there, and there’s your land over there.’ It was all of us Blackfeet, and the first one there used it. And if they moved off, the next one that moved in, it was his. As long as they were tribal members, you know. It’s always going to be our common area. ‘Oh, you can’t use that any more. The guy over here sold it.’ What’s sold?*

What was historically transferred between Blackfeet was not ‘ownership,’ but rights of occupation and use. Within the tribe’s territory, these rights existed only for Blackfeet. The territory was ‘owned’ in common by the tribe, but this was still distinctly different from Western notions of property. McFee (1975) confirms that traditionally, the land and its resources were considered to be held in common among the Blackfeet until somebody exerted energy to, for example, take an animal or gather a plant, in which case, the resource then became ‘owned’ by that individual. The land and its resources could not be held or restricted indirectly by other Blackfeet through claims of ownership. A cultural understanding which explicitly links generations past, present, and future, and extends responsibility along this same spectrum, also suggests an alternative conception of ownership. As this traditionalist explains:

*The Native American’s religion always believes that we’re just here for a short time of being, and that Mother Earth has given us this gift that we’re to use and respect and use it right. There is no real ownership of it, because when you pass on, you pass it onto your next generation, your next child, and they are to learn to respect it and treat it right.*

This description resembles a guardianship over land where actions are based on a sense of responsibility to future generations as well as to the land itself. This association
with the land also arises from a sense of continuity across the generations, and suggests that the same parcel of land will continue to be cared for and passed down through time. As described in the previous chapter, a sense of ‘belonging’ influences the way in which many Blackfeet associate themselves with the mountains.

Belonging does not necessarily imply a stronger degree of attachment, only a different kind of association between people and land than that which is implied through ownership. Whereas ownership implies an association that is potentially temporary and transferable, belonging implies an association that cannot be severed, is maintained across generations, and remains an essential part of a common identity. This is not to suggest that Native people do not understand the concept of private property, but rather, that traditional cultural values and perspectives about property have invariably shaped contemporary notions. As this participant explains:

> If you want to go way back, Indians never owned land. They used it...They were nomadic people, if you go back that far; and they used it, and they still never understood how somebody could own it, to have it and say, ‘Hey, you can’t go there, and you can’t do this.’ And there’s still that mentality here, to a certain extent. 7

This participant provides another insight into the relationship between the Blackfeet and land in recalling their nomadic origins. He suggests that seasonal movements among different Blackfeet bands to areas previously occupied by others would have made European notions of private property an impediment to the way that Blackfeet social and material relationships functioned. He also indicates the influence of these historical cultural patterns upon modern-day Blackfeet, which, like the Blackfeet historical narrative, continue to shape contemporary perspectives of the park and the parkland.
6. Conclusion

As the Blackfeet historical narrative shows, Glacier National Park is inextricably woven into a larger historical context which invariably shapes how Blackfeet interpret the establishment of the park, and its costs and benefits. Rather than the isolated loss of a piece of land for which the Blackfeet were monetarily compensated, the park stands as a piece, a significant piece but a piece nonetheless, of a much longer series of events which all contributed to Blackfeet decline and loss. As a part of this larger context and extended history, the detrimental effects of current park policy and presence on contemporary Blackfeet culture are easily referenced within a wider historical experience. Such an association adds a symbolism to the park which represents as much the accumulated history and experience with the federal government as it does Blackfeet history with the park alone.

As the next chapter describes, participants do not deny or discount the value of the national park, but rather, their enthusiasm is tempered by the role of the park as part of a legacy of dispossession, as well as the implications of its policy and presence on the Blackfeet. This tension between cost and benefit is heavily informed by the significance of the parkland to the Blackfeet, and by the historical narrative presented here. Rather than an attempt to prove or disprove Blackfeet accounts, the goal of this chapter was to show how the Blackfeet historical narrative is constructed, how it sustains itself with its own set of assumptions (which may or may not be accurate), and how it shapes the Blackfeet experience with the national park.

The longevity of the narrative, its prevalence, and widespread acceptance on the reservation, attest to the strength of its inner logic and the semblance of its validity.
among Blackfeet. These characteristics of this historical interpretation are also strengthened by Blackfeet belief in the narrative’s deliberate suppression by the park. There is a sense among many Blackfeet that the NPS does not want to acknowledge this alternative interpretation for fear that it could undermine the dominant park narrative along with the legitimacy and authority this narrative confers upon the NPS. This sense of exclusion from the park’s historical interpretation figures prominently in Blackfeet relationships with the national park. The historical narrative’s prominence across the reservation also suggests that in addition to its role as a counter-narrative to prevailing park interpretations, it is also quite simply, a voice that seeks to be heard.

The next chapter builds upon the groundwork of the previous two chapters, examining Blackfeet relationships with the national park from the perspectives already described. These relationships are framed by significant aspects of the national park itself, which play their own roles in shaping how Blackfeet perceive and interact with the park. These relationships, however, cannot be viewed in isolation from the significance of the parkland to the Blackfeet, and by Blackfeet historical interpretations of the establishment of the park, and their experience with the federal government.
Chapter Six:
Blackfeet Relationships with the National Park Institution

1. Introduction

Building upon the results of the previous two chapters, this chapter examines Blackfeet relationships with the national park institution: its policies, personnel, and presence. Both the significance of the parkland, and a predominantly negative interpretation of park history, heavily shape and influence the tension which characterizes many Blackfeet relationships with the national park. Participant narratives portray this tension as a movement back and forth between the perceived benefits of the park and its protection of the parkland, and the park’s detrimental role in the historical and, many feel, continuing dispossession of the Blackfeet.

An examination of Blackfeet relationships with the park is critical to identifying potential sources of cooperation between the two groups, as well as those areas which fuel conflict between them. Park proponents may be pleased to know that widespread support for the preservation mandate of the park exists on the Blackfeet Reservation. The cultural context from which this support emerges, however, differentiates it from the support of non-Blackfeet park visitors. There still exist significant aspects of park protection which undermine Blackfeet support for the park, particularly those aspects which limit Blackfeet access to the benefits of both the parkland and the park.

Those aspects of the park which undermine Blackfeet support include NPS methods of park management, and the perception by many participants of an inordinate emphasis on law enforcement and profiling techniques which target the Blackfeet. These contribute to the sense of discrimination many Blackfeet also feel characterizes park
employment practices, and more generally, tribal relationships with the government. The park’s real material impact to Blackfeet economic, cultural, and spiritual well-being also tempers participant enthusiasm for the park. Among research participants, this tension most regularly appeared as a prominent sense of Blackfeet exclusion from park goals and concerns for the future. Desired solutions to improvements between the Blackfeet and the park appear to lie within inclusion, rather than a desire for the radical transformation of the national park institution.

This chapter describes how Blackfeet attempt to navigate this tension created by these opposing themes of benefit and loss. Tensions toward the park also arise internally. Fueled by a pervasive sense of powerlessness against the federal government, as well as a historical narrative which confirms this sense, many Blackfeet struggle with their own assertiveness and desire to engage the national park. These internal tensions stand as barriers to cooperation which are equal to any associated with park policy, or to an antagonistic NPS presence. This bundle of complex and often conflicting sentiments frequently emerge within the same breath. Describing a position held in common by many Blackfeet, this participant states, “I’m glad for the park, because it’s preserved. But yet there’s sadness there too. We got ripped off on it so bad” (14).

2. Protecting the Parkland

The animosity many Blackfeet feel toward the national park is tempered by the beneficial role the institution has played in protecting the parkland. While restricting Blackfeet use of the parkland, park policy also restricts the potentially harmful activities of non-Blackfeet as well. The significance of the parkland and its value in an
undeveloped state, with its preserved material, cultural, and spiritual potential, promotes widespread support among Blackfeet for the park’s protective role. Blackfeet relationships with the parkland also suggest that a sense of responsibility to the land is partially fulfilled through park protection. Beyond these distinctly Blackfeet values for park protection, the preservation of the parkland’s aesthetic beauty, protection of wildlife and ecological values, and support for the land’s intrinsic value, all explicitly unite Blackfeet support with that of non-Blackfeet park proponents.

**Blackfeet Support for Park**

Despite the contentious history detailed in the preceding chapter, Glacier National Park, or at least its preservation mandate, appears to enjoy widespread support among the Blackfeet. Nearly every participant valued some aspect of the park’s protection, even if other aspects of the park had negative effects on Blackfeet well-being. The value of protection rests not only in maintaining the land’s ecological health, but also in protecting something more intangible:

*As an individual myself, I wouldn’t allow anybody to start doing industrial work up there. It’s not about that. It’s about what we had once. You know, it’s about keeping that area just as good as we’ve known it to be from the past, to today, to the future.* 20

The value of protection is explicitly linked to its role in preserving a cultural link with the landscape, “*from the past, to today, to the future.*” Within this cultural consistency, what the Blackfeet “*had once,*” is maintained, which suggests that by protecting the land in the state it was “*known*” to the ancestors, Blackfeet may continue to potentially know the land as their ancestors knew it. While the physical properties of
the landscape are preserved through protection, cultural and spiritual properties are preserved as well.

By maintaining the ecological health of the land, medicinal and sacred plants are protected, as is their associated cultural knowledge; by preventing private property ownership and development, sacred sites may still be accessed, and likewise, their potential benefits remain intact. Even if other aspects of the national park, its policies or presence, make these resources somehow inaccessible, the park still protects them from disappearance altogether—assuming the cultural knowledge and understanding necessary to access these resources is not lost. Under protection, the mountains remain a reservoir of cultural and spiritual potential. There is tension, however, over the park’s role in preventing Blackfeet access to these resources, for unlike ecological values, the values contained in this reservoir cannot survive indefinitely without Blackfeet access and care.

Protection also serves to partially fulfill another important dimension of Blackfeet relationships with the parkland, and this is reflected in the strong sense of responsibility implicit in the previous participant’s statement. As described in Chapter Four, a sense of responsibility is a fundamental dimension of Blackfeet relationships with the parkland, suggesting that in protecting these various aspects of cultural and spiritual potential, a responsibility to cultural identity is also partially fulfilled. Similarly, a responsibility to the health of the parkland is fulfilled through the park’s restriction of ecologically harmful activities.

As Blackfeet narratives of the parkland describe, responsibility also requires the active preservation of cultural identity through practices, so as to maintain the health and vitality of cultural knowledge and understanding contained within the parkland. This
significant dimension of responsibility is ironically hindered by the same protective policies which also promote Blackfeet support. This tension is explicitly addressed by this participant, who states:

I have kind of strong feelings [in favor of] a park, and I think that it is right that they did put it into a park. A right and a wrong. That is good they put that up there into a park so it can’t be touched, and so it can be saved. And the only thing we’re getting at is that we do have treaty rights up there. Right? So I wouldn’t mind if the park held onto it for the rest of my life...That is a park where it belongs. 15

The “treaty rights” this participant mentions may appear only as rights to Blackfeet material well-being. Considered as ‘treaty rights,’ that was exactly the understanding of government negotiators who framed the language of the 1895 Agreement in terms which covered their understanding of the complete array of potential subsistence uses of the parkland by the Blackfeet. Viewed through the lens of Blackfeet narratives about the parkland, however, “treaty rights,” and practices in the parkland in general, serve a variety of functions beyond purely material needs.

This participant’s statement describes the tension many Blackfeet feel toward the park, which he still supports maintaining control of the parkland “for the rest of his life.” In fact, this participant has difficulty reconciling the “treaty rights” with popular notions about what a national park should be, later stating that “you can’t have some tourist going up to the park in the summertime and driving alongside the road and seeing Indians picking plants” (15).

Rather than interpreting these conflicting statements as a Blackfeet willingness to relinquish treaty rights for the benefits of the national park tourist experience, these represent an internal conflict over how to pursue an authentic Blackfeet experience in the parkland, while preserving other popular values for national parks. His last statement
also reflects the notion that “treaty rights” represent more than the subsistence uses outlined in the 1895 Agreement, as “picking plants,” was never an explicitly reserved right of the original agreement.

This participant resolves this dilemma in his own mind by later stating, “I think they should [allow], like say in the Fall, then it could be our right to go up there and gather what we need.” His choice of season, when tourist numbers drop significantly, indicates an understanding of the multiple roles played by the national park to multiple cultural perspectives. His sentiment reveals that practices in the parkland are still important to Blackfeet well-being, and that popular notions of parks have also shaped how some Blackfeet view Glacier.

Blackfeet do indeed share many values with park visitors in their support of the park. Aesthetic and intrinsic values of nature seem to transcend any cultural differences between Blackfeet and non-Blackfeet visitors. Many Blackfeet participants described the parkland in terms of its natural beauty, and valued the role the park played in maintaining that visual aesthetic: “That’s what [the national park] means to me. It’s always going to be there, we’re always going to be able to look up there and not see it spotted with houses like it is at Flathead Lake” (2). Another participant describes a common sentiment among participants when he declares, “I want to see, keep it like it is. I don’t want to see it developed. We don’t want to see our Front developed” (12).

Participants spoke about “the beauty of the [parkland]. The cleanliness…how pretty it is, how clean the water is” (19), supporting the presence of the park because they will be able to “wake up every morning and see the beauty of nature” (3). The beauty of the landscape is consistently reinforced by their geographic proximity, as this participant
describes, “Every time I look up, the first thing, I get up in the morning, I’ll have my
coffee, I look up to the mountains and they’re clear. Oh, what beautiful mountains. I talk
to myself. They’re so beautiful” (17).

Participants also described the park in terms of its value in preserving the wilderness
class of the mountains. This traditionalist explains his sense of the value of


There are places in these mountains that humans have never even touched yet.
And it's all preserved. So eventually maybe somewhere down the road, years and
years from now, maybe that place will be touched. And it’ll still be preserved.
It’ll still be here. 18

These statements reveal the compatibility of some Blackfeet views of the park with

those of non-Blackfeet, and indicate a primary convergence for potential cooperation
between the park and the tribe. Blackfeet support for the park is, however, predicated
upon significantly different assumptions from non-Blackfeet proponents. A convergence
of values does not necessarily indicate their identical character. While the values of
ecological health and aesthetic preservation are cited by Blackfeet participants, these
qualities also implicitly contribute to the overall preservation of cultural and spiritual
potential of the parkland.11

**Tribal Shortcomings and the Value of the Park**

Another factor influencing participant support for the national park was the
generally poor regard for the Blackfeet leadership during the summer of 2007 when
research interviews were conducted. Many participants also felt that the Blackfeet tribe

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11 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 22-26,
34, 44-48, 60.
currently lacked the capacity to match the effectiveness of the NPS and national park in preserving the parkland. Many participants were concerned that subsistence rights returned to the tribe might be exploited by a few on the Tribal Council to the detriment of the land and the people.

These sentiments were voiced frequently by participants, generally with a note of sadness, as this educator remarks, “I’m thankful, too, that it’s being preserved, because I really don’t think the Blackfeet, I mean, I really don’t want to say it, but it’s true. We don’t have the capability to take care of it like it should be” (14). Another participant candidly remarks, “If that was just given to us, I think it would be mismanaged, honestly we’d have a hard time right now” (15). Beyond a lack of tribal capacity, the current state of the reservation also promotes support among some participants for the park’s role as a physical and emotional refuge. Some participants value the park partially because, “Browning is full of chaos. You go to the park, you know, it’s just peaceful up there. They don’t let anything get out of hand up there” (13).

Blackfeet claims to the parkland, while sustained through the Blackfeet historical narrative and widely discussed on the reservation, are subtly undermined by an acknowledged lack of preparedness to obtain these rights and manage them appropriately. One of the more enthusiastic supporters of the national park, emphasized his appreciation for the role of the park by stating, “If it wasn’t for the park, all that beautiful stuff up there probably wouldn’t be there, because these guys up here, the tribe, would have probably...who knows what they would have done with it, you know?” (25). Despite his obvious distrust in current tribal leadership, he is not ready to concede a potentially much
greater role for the Blackfeet, in which their own distinct vision of the parkland becomes integrated within the national park institution:

*I think once that next generation comes to be, and they’ve been taught the way we’ve always been taught before the 1900s, I think then we’ll be ready to maybe think about taking back over the park, because we’ll have responsible people in there who actually care about their own people and their own history, culture, and heritage, enough to look at that as more than just a piece of land that we lost and look at it more as a place that, you know, that’s been our home since forever. And look at it more in that sense instead of just something we can make money off of. You know, I think then we’ll take better care of it because we’ll appreciate it more then.* 25

With this statement, this participant explicitly links a focus on ‘authentic’ Blackfeet education, that which occurred prior to the assimilationist efforts of schools, with Blackfeet cultural resurgence and an improvement in tribal capacity, even if only because of a shift in cultural values. This link between cultural authenticity, resurgence, and reservation improvement is supported in the literature (Cummins, 1986; Goddard and Shields, 1997), and argues for the value of parks as ‘cultural repositories’ for tribes, potentially playing a significant role in Blackfeet renewal and resurgence. Despite its more adverse effects, the value of the park is readily acknowledged by those who simultaneously recognize its significant flaws:

*I remain very positive about the park, even today. I can overlook the early, I think, slanted, strategy that was against the tribe’s best interest, to today seeing that Glacier National Park itself has a major role in protecting the land and may, in fact, do a better job than the tribe could. And so somewhere in there I find a mutual appreciation for the stewardship of that area.* 10

The differences between Blackfeet and non-Blackfeet in their support of the park, still manage to find common ground, or a “*mutual appreciation for the stewardship*” of the parkland. This convergence again suggests potential areas of cooperation between the park and the tribe, as long as both sides recognize that these convergent values
emerge from two culturally-distinct perspectives. Blackfeet support for the protection of the parkland, however, cannot overshadow the variety of adverse effects the park has had, and continues to have on the Blackfeet people. Cooperation and collaboration also require addressing the complex tensions which often characterize Blackfeet relationships with the national park.  

3. Blackfeet Tensions with the National Park

Anything that lessens our ability to use those mountains or to go into them, which is a part of our ancient homeland, is traumatizing to me. 

Despite the value most participants attributed to the national park, they also frequently described a tension between the benefits of landscape protection, and the adverse effects of park policy and presence. An even more subtle tension is fueled by what some participants perceive as a pervasive tendency among the Blackfeet to prohibit themselves from adopting a more assertive stance toward the park and its personnel. All of these various sources of tension are not easily isolated within Blackfeet relationships with the national park, as all significantly inform and influence each other.

The Influence of History

The Blackfeet historical narrative is not merely an interpretation, but a real, verifiable account of systematic loss at the hands of the federal government and dominant Anglo-American culture. As another participant previously noted, the Blackfeet are “still experiencing the fallout from it” (14). Grappling with this history and where it has left

\[12\] Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 26, 46-54, 58, 61.
the Blackfeet is a fundamental dimension of the Blackfeet experience, as this participant explains:

I’m a realistic person. I know we can never recapture those days of the buffalo. We could never recapture those days when we migrated from place to place to hunt here or camp here and do this and that. Those days are gone. I don’t care how much we try to revive our old ways, we’ve already been introduced to the modern technology of this world that you can’t go back and live that life 100%, and live this life. Sure, you could take bits and pieces. But still the puzzle isn’t going to be completely filled. And that’s, I think, why our people are in such turmoil today is because we have uprooted our people, taken those things that were the most precious or the things that made them stable, and you’ve said, okay, this is off limits. You could see it, but you can’t touch it. And that’s the same with the mountains here, is that the moment they cross that line to go into the park, they know that they are going to be governed by different rules and regulations. 9

This explanation of how a history of dispossession has affected the Blackfeet people is linked to the way many Blackfeet feel the parkland is “off limits” because of its jurisdiction as a park. From a broader perspective, the introduction of acculturative forces, shifts in subsistence patterns, and other historical changes, have created a “puzzle” of pieces that do not readily fit together. Expressions of concern about having lost access to those “things that made [the Blackfeet] stable,” both reflects the reality of Blackfeet relationships with the national park, as well as the broader pattern of dispossession articulated in the Blackfeet historical narrative.

Parallels between the adverse effects of the national park on Blackfeet well-being, and the broader historical context of dispossession at the hands of the federal government, channel negative Blackfeet sentiment toward the park. As perhaps the most visible symbol of dispossession and loss based on its geographic proximity alone, the park assumes a prominent burden of the negative symbolism and meanings associated with the federal government. As one participant previously stated, it is often difficult to
know whether “it’s the park service [the Blackfeet] are mad at, or just the government” (2).

This sentiment of anger and loss was most pronounced among older participants who had generally experienced a more direct connection with the parkland than younger generations. A sense of loss is, however, present among younger Blackfeet who are informed about and aware of the role the mountains have played in the lives of their relatives and ancestors. There is a sense of ‘what might have been,’ along with the realization that in the faithful pursuit of a distinctly ‘Blackfeet’ way of life, some traditional practices may be forever unavailable to them within the parkland.13

**Park Influence on Limitation and Loss**

The restriction of natural resource use in the national park compounds a general cultural shift among Blackfeet away from these traditional subsistence practices. One female participant (28) lamented the modern tendency to buy berries from the grocery store because in so doing, an opportunity to experience all the benefits of gathering was lost. Not only did Blackfeet miss out on the fresh air and sunshine and other recreational benefits associated with gathering, but they also missed the opportunity to take along a youngster in order to teach her how to properly gather, and to teach her the stories associated with the places where they would gather; stories which taught values and ethics important to the Blackfeet way of life. Through the act of gathering and recounting the oral history, not only were family bonds strengthened through this group activity and exercise, but responsibilities to gather the gifts of the land, to follow the

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13 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 30, 32, 37, 38, 42, 55, 56, 60.
traditions of the ancestors, and to strengthen familial ties were met. The benefits associated with practices in the parkland are consequently lost.

This raises an important point about material practices within the parkland. For many, the lack of convenience from not being able to simply access the parkland for subsistence use has resulted in a tendency to either substitute or forego the subsistence need. Many Blackfeet do use reservation and Forest Service lands to provide for subsistence needs unobtainable within the park. While the material needs of these practices are fulfilled in different locations, hunting and gathering outside of the park may have different benefits and values as compared with engaging in those activities within the parkland, as indicated by the significance of place in practice.

Park restrictions against hunting and gathering cause their own set of tensions, particularly given the Blackfeet view these practices as appropriate expressions of their relationships with the parkland, and Blackfeet oral history frames government attempts to restrict these practices as unjust and illegitimate. Those participants who hunted professed a desire, somewhat guiltily by some, to hunt inside the park. None of these individuals were simply unable to hunt in general as a result of these prohibitions, although the occasional lack of game provoked some to look toward the park:

*The way that the park prohibits that, a lot of the animals, I guess you could say, know that they can’t be shot in the park, and they stay in the park. And nothing comes out...So last year when I didn’t have a job, I didn’t have any way to support my family, I hunted every day, and not once did I get a single elk, because they stayed in the park. I was bound and determined to get an elk, and I almost went in the park and shot one. You know, I probably could have had a pretty good case in court. I mean, my family was starving, and that’s my aboriginal right. 19*

This participant was eventually able to harvest an elk outside of the park boundary, forestalling any challenge to park prohibitions and the Blackfeet reserved right to hunt.
This same participant also feels prohibited, but in a significantly different way, from spiritual practices within the parkland. While hunting is legally prohibited in the park and carries the potential for punishment, spiritual practices are not prohibited in the park. The potential for interruption by park visitors, however, effectively prohibits this participant from using sacred sites in the parkland:

*I’m into my Indian religion a lot, and that’s where we go to do our fast to get our visions, to get our powers. And I haven’t really tried anything in the park, any mountains in the park. But, I mean, they’re spiritual places. Like XXXX, for example. A lot of Indians used to go there to do their fast and do this and that. It’s a pretty place, and I can imagine how people want to see it. But then that prohibits us Indians from going there and praying and trying to get our spiritual guidance, as you’d say.* 19

As this participant indicates, the park plays a very real role in displacing, and in effect, preventing the use of certain sites for spiritual practices, even though the practice itself is not legally prohibited. Because the NPS does not restrict visitation to explicitly sacred sites within the parkland (Reeves and Peacock, 2001), the park plays a passive role in prohibiting Blackfeet spiritual practice. The consequences of this policy, or lack thereof, have had an adverse effect on the spiritual and social well-being of the tribe:

*There’s something that’s been lost. The kids here, they used to go through their vision quest, their transition to life. And the opportunity for going up into those mountains and doing that has been shut off...*The opportunity for the spiritual foundation of our people has been thrown off. 21

A significant aspect of the animosity participants feel toward the park relates to practices which are not legally prohibited by park policy. This Blackfeet elder describes this dilemma as attributable to both the presence of the park, and to unwillingness on the part of Blackfeet to assert their cultural identity and right to practice in the parkland:

*You’ll notice that there are people who go and conduct fasts on Chief Mountain...But they don’t do it on XXXX Mountain or any of those other mountains [in the park]. Why? Because Indians feel that that place is, that...*
Glacier National Park is a barrier to them doing that kind of thing. I often wonder what would happen if somebody did do that...But we’re prohibited, or at least in our own minds, from doing that. Would they really welcome us doing that? 23

The “barrier” he describes could potentially be many things. “Would they really welcome us doing that?” reflects a fear of confrontation with NPS personnel; Glacier National Park itself may stand as a symbol of exclusion which could even potentially disrupt the concentration necessary for spiritual practice; and of course the possibility of disruption from tourists also represents a barrier. The statement that the Blackfeet feel “prohibited...at least in [their] own minds” from otherwise engaging in legally permissible practice, conveys the subtle tension Blackfeet may wrestle with in seeking a more active engagement with the parkland and the national park itself.

This participant appears to attribute Blackfeet tensions with the park to the limiting influence of park policy, but she also implicitly indicates the role the Blackfeet have in their own exclusion:

There are limitations. You can’t just go do the things that you did back in the day that were appropriate to your religion and your growth as a Blackfeet person. You know, like collecting the plants that we use, the animals that we used for food, and some that we just really had significance for, that we would never touch. 14

In addition to hunting and gathering for subsistence and sacred needs, this participant also indicates that Blackfeet interactions with significant animals within the parkland have also been limited. This could even be metaphorically extended to include interactions with the entire natural world within the parkland, which, due to an overall sense of limitation from being unable to “go [into the parkland and] do the things...appropriate to your growth as a Blackfeet person,” is also lost. This again
alludes to the Blackfeet role in this exclusion which this same participant later explains in the context of historical dispossession:

Once that connection was gone, I think we felt alienated from it. A lot of the Blackfeet did. And that’s why some of them won’t go into the park. They feel like they’re not a part of it maybe anymore, or that they’re outsiders rather than the original inhabitants. So I think that’s where a lot of them have that hesitancy. 14

This participant’s comment suggests that the practices which are being forsaken, the visits to the park, and other legally permissible activities, also embody a “connection” directly linked to Blackfeet cultural identity as the “original inhabitants.” With the “alienation” of this “connection,” whether through park prohibitions, NPS presence, or Blackfeet “hesitancy,” the practices themselves lose an essential quality.

This “hesitancy” to directly engage the park was regularly addressed by younger participants who were often more pragmatic in their responses to tensions between the tribe and the national park. Rather than making claims to the parkland and focusing on the dispossession recounted within the historical narrative, they preferred to stress a need for something akin to a paradigm shift within the Blackfeet population; a change of tactic which emphasizes assertiveness and independence. Not only was the tribe unprepared to effectively approach the park for a greater stake in the park’s presence, but a lack of tribal assertiveness only prolonged this lack of capacity. The parkland was consistently cited as an appropriate place in which to both develop this new focus, and towards which to project its attention:

What was taken away [the parkland] from them [Blackfeet elders] was the most important part; now they feel like they’re empty-handed; something’s owed to them, you know. That’s why they want a handout for that. But my generation is trying to understand, is trying to get at that we kind of understand that handout isn’t going to ever come. We have to do something about it. So I feel like my generation is getting towards that. But they’re not going to be completely there yet. 15
What this participant claims his “generation is getting towards,” is a lack of dependence, both materially and psychologically, on the federal government. This participant describes this goal as a lesson he teaches his children:

> What I teach my kids is not to depend on them [the government]. That kind of gave us a crutch, so when we lost our land, they took that from us, so now they owe us something. And now people have been sitting around for a while waiting for them to pay us back. You know, it’s probably never going to happen, so you might as well just get back on your own two feet and start living again. 25

This emphasis on tribal assertion is also indicated in participant narratives describing relationships with the National Park Service, and a Blackfeet desire for greater inclusion within the Glacier National Park institution.\(^{14}\)

### 4. Blackfeet Relationships with the National Park Service

Another significant source of the tension which undermines Blackfeet support for the park arises from Blackfeet relationships with park personnel. These interactions and encounters are primarily with the NPS, but include experiences with park concession employees as well. At their most debilitating, relationships with park personnel inhibit Blackfeet relationships with the parkland and reinforce the negative symbolism of the park and the NPS. At their best, they confirm Blackfeet confidence in the NPS and value in the park.

Participant support for the NPS was decidedly mixed, as opposed to near universal support for some aspects of the protective value of the park. A majority of the participants described specific interactions with park personnel which discouraged their

\(^{14}\) Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 27-31, 36-43, 55, 57, 59, 62, 63, 76.
visits to the park, and suggested that the NPS played a significant role in inhibiting many Blackfeet from choosing to visit the park. Participants also criticized the NPS for the faceless role it seemed to play within their community, and accused park personnel of being poor neighbors who knew little about the Blackfeet or their legacy and claims to the parkland.

Criticisms aside, a few participants had generally favorable sentiments toward park personnel. A few declared they had “never had any trouble with [the NPS]” (11), with “some pretty positive encounters” (22), acknowledging that the NPS “intent in watching over the land is good” (12). Another participant acknowledges the dominant Blackfeet narrative as one which frames Blackfeet experiences with the NPS as being typically negative, yet claims this is not necessarily what will happen to Blackfeet visitors:

I think if you just follow the rules, I mean, just like anything else, if you follow the rules, you’ll go up there, and no one bothers you. I mean, I can go up there and say I’m a tribal member but I don’t have my ID, and they say, well just go ahead and go through. They’ve never gone out of their way to make trouble or anything. So I think more of that is just more political than anything else. 27

Despite this woman’s favorable review, a significant number of participants described tension in their encounters with the NPS. Tensions exist for the same reasons described in the preceding section: the negative historical symbolism of the national park, the park’s detrimental effects on Blackfeet well-being, and an internal struggle over how to move forward. All of these factors influence Blackfeet interactions with the NPS.

**Blackfeet Tensions with Park Personnel**

Participant descriptions of tensions with park personnel often reflect similarities to the Blackfeet historical narrative and its description of tribal experience with the federal
government. From this perspective, the tribe was historically dispossessed by newcomers who were unaware or unconcerned with the effect of their policies and presence on the Blackfeet people.

In a similar way, newcomers arrive every summer to fill the majority of seasonal positions in the park, largely ignorant of the Blackfeet experience. While certainly the loss of employment opportunities to outsiders causes anger and frustration among the Blackfeet, an even more powerful stigma is attached to law enforcement personnel, who play a potentially dominant role in shaping and influencing Blackfeet experiences in and around the national park:

*A lot of the people who come in here and go to work are relatively new, and I call them, ‘by-the-book’ people. You just go ‘by the book’, nobody can cross this line. Here’s a set of rules. And little do they know that that land that they’re sitting over and supposedly monitoring and managing was the Blackfeet’s. And, they don’t understand...They don’t even know anything about the rights, the aboriginal rights, the treaties. And they don’t have any respect for that. And that isn’t a role that park representatives should play to people who are their neighbors.* 12

This notion that the NPS were not ‘good neighbors’ was repeated by a few other participants. Good neighbors were acquainted with each other, and most participants were not familiar with any current NPS employees, even among those participants living near the park boundary. In addition to an apparent unwillingness to being ‘neighborly,’ park rangers were characterized as largely unfamiliar with Blackfeet history, perspectives, and concerns. As managers of ‘Blackfeet land,’ this ignorance is offensive to some participants, verging on disrespect.

It is important to note that many participants were admittedly hesitant to approach park personnel under the pretext of improving a sense of “neighborliness.” This reluctance to engage the park is identified by some participants as another self-limiting
characteristic that the Blackfeet themselves need to overcome, regardless of the NPS stance. As one participant explains, “We really need to teach our own people to be good visitors when they go there, but also to know that they can expect to be treated decently and welcomed when they do go there. So that’s kind of a two-way street there” (14).

Being a good neighbor requires social interaction; it ensures that both parties understand each other; it crafts unique relationships that are not simply interactions which run “by-the-book.” As this Blackfeet rancher explains, park personnel do not necessarily remain poor neighbors, and once acquainted, either side practices certain courtesies with the other. Far more common, however, is the gulf between resident Blackfeet and new park personnel, as he describes:

I’ve had real good relationships with them [park service personnel], (‘Jackson’), as a matter of fact, he stops and visits me here, he’s kind of my old partner. He’d call me and tell that there were cattle in there, or whatever. So I’d saddle up and away I go, and like I say, the only help I got is my dog. I run into some little gal from back east, you know she never knew the country, she’s going straight by the book I guess. I had a visit with her. I mean right there, I wasn’t 20 feet from the line, you know I was in the park, which is just a line drawn up there, got the old cows out of there and my dog. And anyways, she never said nothing, we had a visit, you know, and never said nothing about the regulations, kind of have this moment, and a couple weeks later, I got a fine for $100 dollars for having my dog in the park. 7

This story illustrates a number of the criticisms that participants had for park law enforcement personnel. While this participant’s action was technically illegal, this ‘new’ park ranger either ignored or was unaware of both the traditional courtesies previously afforded him by a veteran ranger, and his sufficient observance of the law’s intent, when following the letter of the law was impractical. A tendency to enforce law “by-the-book” rather than as situations dictate, was offered as proof of a person’s outsider status. As an
outsider, this ranger was also unaware of the special circumstances of this rancher’s situation, something that had historically been recognized by a previous ranger.

A perceived emphasis on law enforcement within the overall management of the park plays a significant role in the way that many Blackfeet feel about the NPS. Those who had generally negative opinions of the NPS commonly accused its personnel of stereotyping Blackfeet visitors. Many participants described feeling as though law enforcement rangers profiled Blackfeet visitors, leading to a general tension and unease:

*They’re always watching for ‘38’ [Glacier County license plate], looking to focus on the negative things of the Blackfeet people, or maybe any Indian, not just Blackfeet people. Just like when we went in. I mean they walk around, and like I said, I know they’re, the majority of the time they’re looking for Indians to be drinking. 3

*If they even think that someone’s driving fast, right away it’s going to be a DUI…Instead of pulling over Washington-plate cars speeding, they’re going to pull over the 38 plates from Montana, you know. 15

To many research participants, this function as law enforcement personnel appears to supersede any duties a commissioned park ranger may be asked to perform. As this participant explains, “The only time I might talk to a park ranger would be, well maybe parking in the wrong place, or don’t pick the flowers. You see what I mean? They’ll be patrolling all the time, you know. And their cars look like cop cars” (23).

The perception that the only encounters made with park service personnel are within a disciplinary, law enforcement context, is just part of a complex set of factors which motivate some Blackfeet to deliberately break the law inside the park. A few participants indicated that some tribal members had committed acts of vandalism in the park, acknowledging that the profiling methods employed by NPS personnel are founded upon
past conflict with Blackfeet visitors. This deliberately antisocial behavior, although limited to extreme cases, illustrates an often significant source of tension between Blackfeet ‘residents’ and NPS ‘outsiders’:

If you lived next door to a group of people, and you failed to or refused to recognize them at all levels...you refuse them entry or you discourage their entry, then you’re going to create a generation of vandals. [Blackfeet] will think, ‘These people don’t want us around. They’re claiming to be better than us. They claim to own something that they absconded with. Let’s vandalize the place.’

This participant describes a significant source of Blackfeet anger and frustration which exists regardless of whether these emotions result in vandalism or not. The significance of the parkland, and the Blackfeet experience described in the historical narrative, only compound NPS actions which are perceived to discount or ignore the Blackfeet presence. Another participant describes the influence of these negative experiences:

People develop bad attitudes, you know. They really do. I mean, we’ve been beat down quite a bit. And even by our own people, our own tribal government. So people develop bad attitudes and bad habits. And sometimes they [Blackfeet] take that into the park when they go in. They have a chip on their shoulder entering. They’re waiting to be approached. And right away they’re on the defense.

This participant explicitly refers to the broader historical context and legacy with the federal government in which the tribe has “been beat down quite a bit,” but also places blame with her own tribal government. These broader contexts contribute to a predilection among some Blackfeet to enter the park with “a chip on their shoulder,” anticipating antagonistic encounters with park service personnel.

A history of antagonism between the two sides has perhaps fueled a culture of suspicion towards the Blackfeet within the NPS. This, at least, is the perception of many participants:
They [NPS] kind of already have us labeled, in a way... But that’s kind of up to us where we have to change that... we have to be more educated. We have to not just show a better appearance, but we have to know more to let them know what we’re doing and what we’re trying to do and then maybe, they’ll take that label off us... You know, we can’t just put it all on the park. It has to come from us too. It has to come from Blackfeet too. 15

This participant is convinced that the NPS will not change its institutionalized perception of the Blackfeet on its own, and rather than remain entrenched and ‘labeled,’ he prefers a more assertive solution to the problem. Confronting the park, however, may require confronting other fears as well. As another participant describes:

Growing up I felt like there was this big process to get into the park; that it was a hassle... it was always intimidating. And there’s always this weird sense of apprehension, like, ‘What are the park people going to say to us when we’re going through?’ Because when, probably ten years ago we tried to do this, and they drill you, I mean, they just drill you with these questions. 26

Instead of remaining apathetic, however, she asserts a right based on her cultural identification with the parkland, to approach the park on her own terms:

And so I’m really in that place of becoming educated and exploring my relationship, getting comfortable and accepting that I have a right to that. That was the part which was missing for a long time. I have a right to this. I don’t have to justify it to anybody. You know, not even to myself, but not to any park person in a little booth that’s going to ask me how much Indian I am to get in. 26

She indicates what a number of younger participants described as a need to address, on their own, the tension which has served to distance Blackfeet from their cultural legacy. These solutions seek to address a prominent sense of exclusion from the park institution. 15

15 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 33, 38, 40, 42, 43, 55, 56, 60-73.
5. Blackfeet Sense of Exclusion from Glacier National Park

You talk about Glacier, you can’t exclude the Blackfeet. You can’t, because Glacier is the Blackfeet. 9

When Blackfeet say “you can’t exclude the Blackfeet” they are referring to the significance of the parkland to the Blackfeet; their historical and cultural legacy; their geographic proximity. To make this declaration, however, suggests that in fact, many Blackfeet do feel excluded from the park. This sense of exclusion was actually quite pervasive among participants, and reappeared frequently in narratives describing ways for improving Blackfeet relationships with the national park.

Rather than seeking the return of land or subsistence rights, some participants looked to Blackfeet inclusion within the national park institution as a means of countering the sense of loss and limitation associated with the park. Blackfeet desire for inclusion further indicates the value participants place in the park, and a common belief among Blackfeet that their future is inextricably bound with both the park and the parkland.

Participants desired to see an increased Blackfeet presence within the national park institution, through increased economic and livelihood opportunities. They also sought increased opportunities to represent themselves to park visitors in park literature, programs and presentations. Many participants simply wanted to feel more welcome within the Glacier National Park institution as a way to counter “those feelings of childhood and not having a place or a belonging to those [park] structures…and knowing that you will not be a part of that organization if you’re a Blackfeet.” 27

Park employment, both with the NPS and concessions, still remains a primary way many Blackfeet seek inclusion. While a substantial number of Blackfeet are hired every
season, the nature of the positions typically offered to Blackfeet may only compound a sense of exclusion:

_I did dishes there. I cleaned rooms, and I worked in the laundry, both for East Glacier [Glacier Park, Inc.] and St. Mary [Lodge]. Black’s [St. Mary Lodge], I used to work for them doing laundry. So I never could get a front desk job with them even though I had an education. That was at an associate level before I got my bachelor’s. But I could never get a shot with them._ 14

This description is a common one, and employment within the lodges confirms a highly visible tendency to place Blackfeet employees in positions largely out of view. This inability to “get a shot,” succinctly expresses one of the most prominent Blackfeet sentiments in narratives about the park, both with concessions and the NPS. As this participant later explains, barriers which begin from without eventually become erected from within:

_That’s something we need to cultivate with our young people, that they can actually have a career in the park. They’ve always thought, no, that’s something they can’t have, because we all know we’re in servant positions when we go there, toilet cleaners. I know that was, when I told somebody my (‘relative’) was a ranger there, and they said, ‘Oh, is she a toilet ranger?’ _14

While Blackfeet participants sought inclusion within the park for explicitly economic and subsistence reasons, a significant number of participants described a different type of inclusion which struck at the heart of the park’s symbolism and public discourse: _“The park has always held the Blackfeet, in their publications, almost like a magical, mystical type of scene they want to put within the minds of the visitors to say that, yeah, they were here, but now they’re gone”_ (9).

This comment suggests that in their representation of the Blackfeet to tourists, the park succeeds in marginalizing the Blackfeet people as a relic of history without modern associations to the park. This participant also suggests that this approach ensures that
tourists will always link the Blackfeet of Glacier Park to ancestral times, rather than considering the evolution of their relationships with the parkland today.

Another participant more plainly states that the NPS deliberately misrepresents the Blackfeet legacy in order to support official park history: “They always say there was no ‘Man in Glacier.’ Well there was. They just don’t want to have anybody know it” (22). Participants generally accused the federal government of “denying the reality of the Native American experience” (21) and explicitly link Blackfeet exclusion from the park with a larger history of federal neglect of Indian needs and concerns. By excluding the Blackfeet narrative in favor of a narrative which relegates them to the annals of history, the park denies the validity of their contemporary presence, and perpetuates a Blackfeet sense of exclusion and neglect.

Some Blackfeet participants also perceive a tendency by the park to discount the Blackfeet legacy and experience within the parkland in focusing heavily on the wilderness character of the landscape. As this Blackfeet elder counters, “For thousands and thousands of years my people have been using that area for sources of spirituality, for sources of inspiration, as a food source, and as a place of getting medicine, all those things” (23). To these participants, the park’s historical portrait of the Blackfeet not only undermines a contemporary presence, but also misrepresents Blackfeet relationships with the parkland, as well as the character of the landscape itself.

When describing how to promote Blackfeet inclusion in the park, participants cited access to representation as frequently as any other concern. Representation here refers to how the Blackfeet are portrayed within the ‘official’ Glacier narrative which is presented to park visitors. This inclusion in the narrative would not just be for the benefit of
visitors, but for the benefit of Blackfeet themselves. To include Blackfeet interpretations of history, parkland meanings and values, simultaneously validates them:

There are so many tribes across the nation that have totally been displaced from their origins. Now we take a great deal of pride in the fact that we’ve always been where we are. And I think more recent archeology has proven for thousands of years. So when I go to see a presentation at anywhere in Glacier Park and they talk about the Blackfeet having only been here for 300 years, and they’re just visitors like you, you know...And then do an accurate presentation on how were these lands, I mean, what did they do to take care of it? It didn’t start just getting taken care of when Glacier Park was established. There was caretaking going on, the use of fire, even just human contact with the land that took place. Tell that part of it. Present that part of it so that people know that there’s always been somebody here, and there’s always someone who took care of this place so that they know that it has that history behind it. And it can be done in such a good way. It’s not like we want to exclude anybody. 27

This participant seeks the inclusion of Blackfeet perspectives and history within the dominant Glacier narrative. The desire for access to representation is fueled by cultural pride and a need to acknowledge the Blackfeet legacy. Access also provides a way for Blackfeet to present their own historical interpretations and perspectives about their presence in the parkland. Her final comment that the Blackfeet do not want to “exclude anybody” is an important validation of the national park and its value to visitors and the larger public. Her desire to present the parkland as a ‘peopled’ landscape in which Blackfeet interacted frequently and carefully with the land to maintain its health would require a re-conceptualization of ‘natural’ parks which have generally downplayed human influences on park landscapes. Human history in the park seems to be concerned instead with individuals who have come and gone: miners, trappers, park proponents and historic personages, as well as somewhat romanticized American Indians. To reconsider Glacier’s history as one which does not “exclude anybody” would require a reimagining
of what national parks could actually become, along with a reckoning of what parks have actually been. 16

6. Conclusion

When considering Glacier National Park, many Blackfeet are confronted by complex feelings of both benefit and loss. While the park promises the protection of the parkland, it is simultaneously responsible for numerous adverse effects to Blackfeet well-being. This tension between the benefits of the park and its more negative effects, characterize a significant number of Blackfeet relationships with the national park.

The sources of Blackfeet tension with the park are both tangible and intangible, with a significant amount of influence exerted by the Blackfeet historical narrative itself. As a potent ‘discursive shorthand’ for this narrative of systematic land and cultural dispossession, Glacier National Park attracts Blackfeet animosity merely as a federal entity. While this symbolism frames Blackfeet relationships with the park in an abstract fashion, interactions with park personnel, park prohibitions, and other characteristics of the park have very real, tangible effects on Blackfeet.

This combination of adverse tangible and intangible effects has had an apparently debilitating effect upon the attitudes of some within the Blackfeet community. Many participants recounted a general apathy and lack of tribal assertiveness toward the park. Tension within the community itself over widespread mistrust of tribal leadership results in support for the protective mandate of the park, but also undermines Blackfeet capacity to seek solutions to address a profound sense of exclusion from the park institution.

16 Additional quotes which inform this section are found in Appendix 3, individually numbered as: 6, 35, 38, 39, 55, 58-60, 62, 63, 68, 69, 71-76.
While this research did not focus on community conflict, this conflict invariably found its way into participant narratives of the park and the NPS.

This tension within the Blackfeet community, however, suggests vitality rather than decay, for the tension was largely over breaking with old tendencies which appeared to alienate the Blackfeet from the park rather than aiding in addressing a sense of exclusion. This desire for inclusion stems from a widespread belief in the value of protecting the parkland, and a general esteem for the ability of the NPS to effectively perform this task. This inclusion was desired in a variety of forms. Beyond seeking a greater role in the management of the landscape, Blackfeet participants also sought to reestablish the role of the parkland in the lives of the Blackfeet, within the national park framework. These desires herald a call for a revised conceptualization of what Glacier National Park could and should actually represent and how it should be managed.

The final chapter examines how this reimagining of Glacier might appear, along with how Blackfeet needs associated with the parkland might begin to be accommodated. To lend insight into these somewhat speculative endeavors, a refined definition of “Aboriginal cultural landscapes” is presented as part of the conclusion of this research. This allows for an improved understanding of the full value of the parkland to the Blackfeet, as well as the potential role of the park in Blackfeet cultural resurgence and renewal.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

1. Introduction

For the Blackfeet people, the Glacier parkland is a significant cultural resource which, rather than a monument to a distant past, represents hope for the future. The landscape remains a source of vital, currently relevant cultural knowledge, a place for cultural practice, and what many Blackfeet feel is the embodiment of authentic Blackfeet identity. The landscape remains significant despite the absence of a widespread Blackfeet presence in the park, either among the ranks of park employees, or along the park roads and trails. While Blackfeet place names are prevalent throughout the parkland, the lack of a dominant Blackfeet presence, both as employees and as visitors, might suggest to some that the park has become less relevant to the Blackfeet in modern times and that relationships with the parkland are only relevant from a predominantly historical perspective. This research suggests that, to the contrary, the parkland may be more valuable to the Blackfeet in a modern context as the “last refuge,” in the wake of significant land and cultural dispossession.

Blackfeet explain their lack of a stronger presence in the park as the result of park policies which prohibit certain practices, an intimidating and potentially confrontational NPS presence, and a pervasive unwillingness within the tribe to engage the park. Conflict between the tribe and the park is rooted in these factors, as well as in the tension between hope and loss which the park represents to many Blackfeet. While the parkland’s cultural value remains protected from being despoiled, it still remains at risk of eventually fading away.
Understanding the full value of the Glacier landscape not only lends insight into its value for the Blackfeet people, but also describes what parkland landscapes may mean to other indigenous groups, particularly those who have suffered similar territorial and cultural disposessions. Within the violent upheaval and loss of dispossession, these landscapes, because of their protected status as national parks, remain some of the last ‘authentic’ links to a distinct cultural identity and heritage. The irony lies in the fact that these landscapes were often part of these same historic disposessions of land and culture, and continue, in many ways, to repeat some of these same injustices. Despite the preservation of cultural values in these landscapes, Native peoples often find their ability to access these values disrupted by parks. In the preservation of these landscapes and these distinct values, however, lies an opportunity for Native renewal and resurgence, and for the federal government, an opportunity to address a history of Native dispossession.

How Blackfeet needs associated with the parkland may be sufficiently accommodated, and how the parkland and the park might subsequently appear, are matters of some speculation. Blackfeet participants themselves had difficulty articulating just what would repair the damage done from nearly a century of limitation and loss associated with the park. The park’s negative symbolism is prominently offset by widespread support for many of the protected values of the park, including some which are shared across cultures, by Blackfeet and non-Blackfeet alike. Blackfeet participants appeared to believe their distinct values and perspectives would only add to the park, and would not necessarily replace the values currently protected by the park.

Realizing the full natural and cultural value of the Glacier landscape, however, appears to require a reimagining of our national parks. Glacier’s establishment as a
‘natural’ park, protecting a ‘natural’ landscape through the exclusion of cultural elements, contrasts with non-western worldviews in which there is no dichotomy between nature and culture. To accommodate Native cultural landscapes, national parks must be reimagined as places where nature and culture have, for some peoples, been effectively merged. A new national park narrative must also be composed, acknowledging a diversity of perspectives, the validity of alternative interpretations, and the diverse values of resources which may not appear similarly valuable to all. As caretakers of natural and cultural heritages, the NPS faces the challenge of managing for multiple values within single park units. How this may actually appear within Glacier National Park, however, would not necessarily challenge the fundamental values we seek to protect within parks.

2. Parklands as Cultural Landscapes

This research indicates a need to reexamine the way we think about the cultural resources of national parks. In addition to the heritage values contained within many ‘natural’ park landscapes, the NPS has acknowledged the value of parkland resources to Native peoples and their cultural and spiritual well-being (NPS, 1998, as cited in Howell, 1994). This research certainly confirms this value of the Glacier parkland to the Blackfeet, and provides insight into how this value may be most effectively realized, preserved, and managed.

As a cultural landscape, the Glacier parkland contains all of the qualities of the definition offered in Chapter Two as:

…a place valued by an Aboriginal group (or groups) because of their long and complex relationship with that land. [The landscape] expresses their unity with the natural and spiritual environment. It embodies their traditional knowledge of
spirits, places, land uses, and ecology. Material remains of the association may be prominent, but will often be minimal or absent. (Buggey, 1991)

The Blackfeet historical legacy frames their current relationships with the parkland, and is repeatedly affirmed by research participants and confirmed by archaeological, genetic and linguistic evidence. This legacy and its significant cultural and spiritual investment in the parkland, has also embedded Blackfeet identity in the landscape, confirming a “long and complex relationship with the land.” Also prevalent is a sense of Blackfeet “unity” with the parkland, such that their association with the landscape is integral to Blackfeet well-being. As numerous participants confirm through a variety of expressions, “Blackfeet belong to the mountains.” The parkland obviously is a significant repository of Blackfeet cultural knowledge and understanding, and while material evidence of these relationships remains largely absent, the relationship remains intact within the minds of the Blackfeet people.

The parkland represents much more to the Blackfeet than this definition of cultural landscapes alone might suggest, particularly in light of a history of dispossession. The pervasive sense of loss associated with this dispossession has significantly influenced the character and value of the cultural landscape. The landscape’s significance as a link to the meanings, symbols, and material practices which embody Blackfeet origin and identity is heightened because of this historical loss.

**Historical Dispossession and the Value of the Cultural Landscape**

Many participants refer to the parkland as a homeland despite the fact that the Blackfeet never permanently resided there. This reference provides insight not only into the nature of ‘homelands,’ but also into the significance these participants place in the
parkland. For Blackfeet, the homeland is not just a place, but an idea about ‘authenticity,’ cultural identity, and what it means to be a ‘Blackfeet Indian.’ As the “last refuge,” the parkland stands as a last direct physical link to this ancestral past.

To the Blackfeet, the parkland symbolizes a continuity with the past because it has not been significantly developed, exploited, or harmed; in most ways, it remains essentially the same physical landscape from the age of the ancestors. Because the parkland is the last relatively ‘pristine’ and intact landscape left from original Blackfeet territory, it also represents the era prior to dispossession and loss. While the national park acts as a ‘discursive shorthand’ for Blackfeet dispossession by the federal government, the parkland also acts as a similarly potent and condensed symbol of Blackfeet culture and identity.

Rather than simply embodying this symbolism, however, the parkland remains a living link to the Blackfeet past, and as such, the cultural landscape has become a reservoir of hope for cultural renewal as other dimensions of the Blackfeet ‘way of life’ have disappeared. While not necessarily seeking to replicate a fully ‘traditional’ lifestyle, the hope is instead to replicate the ideas associated with the Blackfeet of that time: sovereignty, harmony with the natural and supernatural world, freedom, and strength of identity. From this perspective, the cultural landscape represents a place of origins and of potential rebirth.

Ironically, the natural character of the landscape, and thus a significant aspect of its cultural value, is directly attributable to its designation and protection as a national park. The irony rests in the fact that to most participants, Glacier National Park represents in some significant way, the collective dispossession of the Blackfeet people. The cultural
Cultural Landscapes and Practices

This research also indicates that in order for the value of cultural landscapes to remain vital and relevant to the peoples for whom they are significant, these resources must remain open to indigenous practices and interaction. This has major implications for tribal support of national parks, for while parks are valued for the protection of cultural landscapes, this value is significantly undermined by those aspects of the national park which restrict and discourage Native presence and practices in the parkland.

As Blackfeet describe, the significance of relationships with the parkland is largely sustained through on-site practices which realize material as well as cultural and spiritual values. The preservation mandate of the park has actually protected not only these various cultural values of the landscape, but also the potential for Blackfeet to realize these values. Unlike ecological, aesthetic, or intrinsic values, however, which are largely managed in parks through the restraint of activity, much of the value of cultural landscapes is lost if on-site practices and interaction with the land is disallowed. The value of the parkland as a cultural landscape is not widely appreciated or understood, for in the park’s strict preservation mandate, and in its emphasis on historical representations of the Blackfeet, it risks the atrophy and loss of this value.

These values do not simply ‘reside’ in the landscape, but are a product of specific practices in specific places. Through practice and place, the cultural value of the
landscape is realized. Without practice and tribal engagement with the landscape, cultural value remains locked in the landscape where it will remain as it is implicitly presented in the official park narrative: as a relic of history.

The heritage values of this landscape appear quite relevant to the vitality of contemporary Blackfeet culture. While this research has not directly explored cross-cultural comparisons of the notion of ‘history,’ Blackfeet describe connections with an ancestral past which appear to be far more relevant to their daily lives than would the historical connections of their Western counterparts. These connections provide a sense of cultural authenticity many Blackfeet seek in their lives. The significance of Blackfeet practices in the parkland is precisely because they link the individual to a larger ancestral tradition.

3. The Nature of Conflict between the Blackfeet and the Park

Descriptions of conflict between resident peoples and national parks are often framed purely as struggles over material values. The Blackfeet conflict with Glacier appears to be much more complex, embodying more than a struggle for material well-being. Conflicts between tribes and parks are also struggles over meanings, symbols, and representation; over adjustment to historical and contemporary dispossession; over the ability to affirm one’s cultural identity. A struggle for material value is certainly an inextricable part of this equation, for when individuals on the reservation struggle with poverty, the material resources inside the park become increasingly important.

Blackfeet support for the value of park protection indicates that conflict rests prominently in a sense of their exclusion from the national park institution itself. Park
managers must understand conflict as a complex tension between the park’s costs and benefits to the Blackfeet, rather than simply as a one-sided demand for treaty rights or economic opportunity.

Addressing Conflict through Inclusion

Addressing conflict through Blackfeet inclusion within the park institution also begins to address the matter of realizing the full value of the Glacier landscape. Accommodating Blackfeet cultural needs associated with the parkland and the diverse ways these may manifest, also addresses an NPS mandate to recognize and manage for the cultural values of natural landscapes. Solutions only begin through an engagement in dialogue which acknowledges tribal and NPS understandings of the parkland landscape, interpretations of the historical events surrounding the establishment of the park, and the larger goals and purposes of the park. While this research sought to portray the Blackfeet position on these issues, the perspectives of park officials must necessarily be presented to tribal officials as well.

Accommodating Blackfeet concerns will require altering the current decision-making process within the park to meaningfully include Blackfeet voices. Only the Blackfeet and the NPS can ultimately decide how to navigate potential changes and what sorts of decision-making structures to employ, but change will ultimately be required. Collaborative decision-making processes between different governmental agencies provide potential frameworks for co-management approaches. The exclusive legal jurisdiction held by the NPS does not diminish the stake the Blackfeet hold in the management of the Glacier landscape, nor their ethical right to be included in the
management process. Realizing the full value of the Blackfeet cultural landscape in Glacier will also require improved access for on-site practices, for without these, Blackfeet relationships with the parkland will not significantly improve in ways important to Blackfeet well-being.

Park officials need to recognize the influence of the Blackfeet historical narrative on the relationships between the tribe and the park. While this history may appear distant and hardly relevant from Western perspectives, it is important to recognize that this history remains very relevant to the Blackfeet, and continues to be recounted today in Blackfeet homes. It is also important for park managers to understand that Blackfeet are attempting to overcome the effects of this history, and many seek an exchange with the park that willingly places this larger context of dispossession to the side, despite the debilitating effects it has had, and continues to have on the Blackfeet people.

Likewise, park employees should have access to materials which improve their understanding of the landscape within which they work, as well as opportunities to become more familiar with the local reservation community. Neufeld (2008) suggests promoting an increased public awareness of Blackfeet concerns, meanings, and interpretations, through various media outlets, which in the case of the park, includes visitor programs, park literature, and outlets within the park service itself. These may include specific presentations for park staff by cultural leaders from the reservation. This is not to suggest that past park administrations have not pursued such projects; the program ‘Native America Speaks,’ for example, offers weekly interpretive programs to park visitors by Blackfeet cultural leaders. Rather, these suggestions are meant to emphasize that there is still much that can be done.
Other areas of contention between tribal members and park staff have been outlined in the last chapter. The NPS should more actively engage the tribal community, particularly those individuals who live near the park boundary and are more liable to encounter park personnel. This research indicates that continued tribal support of the park rests in establishing a rapport with ‘ordinary’ Blackfeet rather than simply with tribal leadership. Park officials must recognize that the close kinship networks which exist across the reservation easily and rapidly disseminate news of both positive and negative encounters with park service personnel.

Many Blackfeet participants also acknowledged the need for the Blackfeet themselves to address a sense of exclusion from the park by adopting a more assertive stance toward the NPS. This is not necessarily a more aggressive stance, but rather, a more informed and sustained pressure on the park to acknowledge Blackfeet concerns. This pressure should not simply come from tribal leaders, but from the general Blackfeet public as well. Some participants felt that a focus on educating tribal members, particularly younger ones, about their own cultural heritage and legacy with the parkland was necessary. I would add that education also include the basic rules and regulations of the national park itself, to familiarize Blackfeet with what they should expect as they attempt a more active engagement with the park.

4. Realizing the Full Value of the Glacier Landscape

Whether or not Glacier National Park chooses to more actively engage the Blackfeet community will influence the future of the park, particularly as the population on the Blackfeet Reservation continues to grow. It will always remain in the park’s best interest
to maintain a cooperative relationship with the tribe and its members, rather than simply viewing the Blackfeet community as outside the purview of park interest. The Blackfeet could not only play a cooperative role in regional conservation beyond the park’s boundaries, but could also contribute dramatically to the park visitor experience, and to a greater appreciation for the full value of national parks and the landscapes they protect.

The park has numerous pragmatic reasons for seeking a greater level of cooperation with the tribe. As natural ecosystems do not follow political boundaries, their health depends in part on those areas outside of park boundaries. Wildlife follow migratory patterns outside of parks where they can be hunted, forest fires cross political boundaries into and out of parks, pollution can arrive from water sources upstream outside of parks, or through the air from populated valleys nearby. All of these forces are actively or potentially at work in and around Glacier National Park. The Blackfeet Nation may pursue economic and development projects that could potentially impact aspects of the park visitor experience. Two such options described by some participants were reservation toll booths outside of the park boundary, and the placement of wind turbines on tribal land visible from within the park. I know nothing about the likelihood of either of these options, however, they illustrate the very real influence the tribe could exert upon park visitor experiences.

There are also numerous ethical reasons that the NPS should seek greater cooperation with the Blackfeet. This research indicates the potentially significant role the park could play in cultural resurgence among the Blackfeet people. The value of the parkland to Blackfeet identity was a dominant theme from participant interviews. Improved access and engagement with the parkland could have dramatic effects to
Blackfeet well-being, particular for younger tribal members. Research participants who were educators on the reservation all made reference to the positive effect that an improved cultural identity had on student performance and general well being. As one such participant noted, “The students we work with, it’s just amazing the transformations you see with them when they realize what kind of a connection with the land they have” (26).

National parks could become effective agents of living cultural preservation for tribes whose land and resource bases have shrunk, whose practices have been both prohibited and inhibited, and who still retain significant historical and cultural connections to these protected areas. This would require a reimagining of the character of parks, as well as a reminder of the purpose of parks. A closer look at a few of the practices which would help realize Blackfeet values shows how these do not fundamentally challenge or degrade the values for which the park is already protected.

**Gathering and Spiritual Practices in the Park**

The impacts sustained by the land to support current recreation opportunities within the park dispel the illusion of a landscape unaffected by current visitor use. Instead, these impacts indicate that even when recreation is regulated by the park it still invariably alters aspects of the landscape’s natural character and appearance. Whether these impacts are caused by motorized boats on the park’s waters, the use of horses in the backcountry, or the gathering of wood for backcountry campfires, these activities are acceptable because they are traditional forms of recreation within national parks.
The sustainable gathering of plants, roots, and other materials arguably causes no more impact than the soil compaction and spread of noxious weeds which invariably accompanies stock use in the backcountry. However, because traditional gathering does not have the historical acceptance of stock use, it may seem threatening to the natural character of the landscape. Allowing specific, sustainable gathering practices for Blackfeet under a collaborative agreement between the park and the tribe to guard against abuses would be little different from managing these other forms of recreation.

Similarly with Blackfeet spiritual practices, temporarily closing sacred areas for Blackfeet use would be little different from the temporary closure to the outlet of Hidden Lake for the spawning of fish, or the south face of Mount Henkel for calving sheep, or the off-trail areas around Logan Pass for emerging spring vegetation. While these temporary closures, and many others like them, are all established to primarily benefit non-human dimensions of the landscape, they also benefit the values of park visitors in providing more fish to catch, more sheep to view, and more flowers to enjoy. Temporarily closing access to various sites for Blackfeet spiritual practices also protects landscape values, both the sacred value of these sites themselves, and the spiritual values of those who benefit from these practices. Informing non-Blackfeet visitors of the landscape values these closures sustain might also enlist support and appreciation similar to the “existence value” of just knowing important landscape values are being protected (Harmon and Putney, 2003). Spiritual closures fit within the fundamental purpose of closures, but challenge our ideas about what such closures have been traditionally used for.
These arguments are made to suggest that accommodating Blackfeet needs does not challenge the fundamental values currently promoted in parks. While Glacier is managed as a ‘natural’ landscape, it is still very much a ‘cultural’ landscape, even excluding Blackfeet values. By constructing and managing an infrastructure which supports particular recreation experiences, cultural values are promoted and supported at the expense of the ‘natural’ landscape. These activities are accepted within the goals of natural resource conservation and are managed to minimize their generally unavoidable impacts upon the land. To accommodate Blackfeet practices and the cultural landscape these promote simply requires a shift in perspective, not in values, for ultimately, the purpose of parks is to sustain and enrich the human spirit, as much as it is to protect the natural environments within their care.

5. Future Directions

Future research investigating different aspects of the relationships between tribes and national parks will help refine our understanding of how Native and NPS interests can be simultaneously achieved. I would argue that realizing the full value of park landscapes actually benefits everyone’s interests. Not only would this promote cooperation between tribes and the NPS, but park visitors might also gain an added cultural dimension to their park experience through a more prevalent Native presence.

Future research investigating Native American relationships with parks and parklands needs to be balanced by research investigating these same issues among park personnel. Understanding park culture and its stance toward Native communities with claims to park landscapes is necessary to continue movement toward cooperation. This
research might address current attitudes by park service personnel towards Native claims and perspectives. Research might also specifically address the viability of accommodating particular Native practices in parks, both from philosophical and practical perspectives.

Future studies might also investigate park visitor perspectives about these same issues. How would visitors react to Native American practices in the parkland? Which would be acceptable; which would not? Would hikers and climbers in Glacier be willing to observe temporary closures for gathering practices, or spiritual practices? Would visitors be interested in and amenable to a greater Blackfeet presence in their park experience? By examining these issues across the various constituencies of Glacier National Park, not only may the paths toward an improved future be made clear: cultural resurgence on the reservation; an improved visitor experience; a more effectively managed park resource; but we may one day be able to realize more of the full value of national parks and their significance to Native peoples.

While this research was not designed to be strictly generalizable to other contexts, it may be useful within other parks as a tool for addressing relationships between tribes and parks. As this research began from initially broad research questions, future inquiries either by managers, or researchers, may begin from a more focused approach when guided by some of the themes described here.

Of particular importance is the understanding that Native cultural landscapes are places which require on-site practice to realize their full value. This is potentially critical information for non-Native managers in charge of these resources. This research also suggests that conflict between tribes and parks are far more complex than struggles over
material values initially suggest. These general themes may indicate where to begin a more detailed examination of tribal relationships with other national parks, for it is in the details where solutions to improving these relationships are ultimately discerned.

This research suggests that parks may play an even more significant role in our national heritage than was first imagined. In protecting some of the last vestiges of the natural world, parks also protected the cultural aspect of their landscapes for Native peoples. Now, amidst an extensive history of dispossession and loss, these landscapes represent some of the last direct links to this cultural heritage. If this research indicates one important message, it is the need to reimage our national parks in order to embrace this value as well, before it too is lost.
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Appendix 1: Use of the name “Blackfeet”

During my research, I came in contact with a few Blackfeet elders who informed me that the use of the term “Blackfeet” is actually a misnomer, applied by English speaking people to refer to the tribe. This name was officially adopted for the purposes of the Wheeler-Howard, or Indian Reorganization Act, when the tribe sought official recognition by the federal government.

The Nitsitapii are technically composed of four bands, as the Piikáni have both a northern and southern branch, in addition to the Siksiká, and the Kainaa bands. The southern Piikáni inhabit the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, and are the “Blackfeet” referred to in this research. Siksiká actually means “Blackfoot” in the language, and so precisely identifying the people described in this research would be to call them Piikáni, or Piegan.

The diversity of stories about how these tribes were named, along with the history behind the term “Blackfeet,” is beyond the scope of this research. This appendix is to acknowledge that a more appropriate name for this people would be Piikáni, however, because of the familiarity of the Blackfeet name, and in order to avoid confusion among park staff and visitors, I have chosen to use it in this research.

Tribal members do refer to themselves as Blackfeet, using this term to refer to the singular as well as the plural voice. This perhaps differentiates them from the Siksiká, or Blackfoot Tribe in Canada. Rather than saying, “I am a Blackfoot Indian,” Piikáni will say, “I am a Blackfeet Indian.” The original language of all the Nitsitapii is called “Blackfoot.”
Appendix 2: Sample Interview Guide

First of all, thank you very much for your time. I am a graduate student at the University of Montana. It’s important to let you know that I am not funded by or representing Glacier National Park. Everything you tell me during this interview is confidential, which means that your name will never be connected to anything you say. I am taping our conversation so that I can use your opinions and ideas to describe a picture of how the Blackfeet feel about these topics.

I’d like to talk specifically about the land on the east side of the park with historical significance to the Blackfeet. I’m interested in understanding Blackfeet relationships with this land, and especially in understanding how the national park affects Blackfeet relationships with this land. If you are uncomfortable during the interview, you may refuse to answer a question or end the interview at any time. You have my contact information, and I will be available to answer any questions about this study that you may have. We can begin whenever you are ready…

1) How long have you lived on the reservation? Did you spend time on the east side of the park growing up?

2) How would you describe the land on the east side of the park? How would you describe this land to someone who has never been there?

3) How would you describe your relationship with this land? What’s important to you about this land? How often do you visit this land? What are some (other) ways that you use this land? What does this land provide you/other Blackfeet/tribe?

4) How do other Blackfeet talk about this land? How do other Blackfeet use the land?

5) How does the presence of the national park affect your relationship with this land? How would you say the presence of the national park affects other Blackfeet relationships? How do national park rules affect your relationship with this land? How do park businesses, such as GPI, affect your relationship with this land? How do visitors to the national park affect your relationship with this land? How do park service personnel affect your relationship with this land?

6) What do you think about the way this land is managed by the park service? What are some specific things the park service does that you disagree with? What are some specific things the park service does that you agree with?

7) Who do you think benefits from the way this land is managed? How do they benefit?
8) What changes would you like to see in the way this land is managed?

9) What role do you think the Blackfeet should play in the management of this land?

10) [I understand that there are some Blackfeet who want this land returned to the tribe.] How do you think your relationship with this land would be different if it were returned to Blackfeet control?

11) Is there anything you would like to add about either this land or any aspect of the park?

12) Who else would you recommend that I speak with? How would I contact that person? Can I tell that person that you sent me?
Appendix 3: Additional Interview Quotes

As a way to make this appendix easier to reference, each quote is followed by a corresponding numeric code for each sub-section present in Chapters Four and Six. The following key provides the section titles for the codes. Each quote is also individually numbered for reference from the text in footnotes following each sub-section. The number in ( ) indicates the number of different participants who are included in each category. There are 20 participants quoted in this entire appendix.

1-Blackfeet Origins and the Parkland (8) 9-The Significance of Place in Practice (9)  
2-The Blackfeet Collective (8) 10-Sense of Belonging (4)  
3-Cultural Identity and Storytelling (3) 11-Blackfeet Support for the Park (9)  
4-Place Names in the Parkland (3) 12-Tribal Shortcomings (10)  
5-Responsibility to Culture (7) 13-Influence of the Historical Narrative (7)  
6-Responsibility to Others (7) 14-Limitation and Loss (12)  
7-Responsibility to Land (9) 15-Blackfeet Tensions with the NPS (10)  
8-Knowledge, Sacred Power, Practices (8) 16-Blackfeet Sense of Exclusion (9)

The codes following each quote represent the most obvious sub-sections they influenced, however, these codes are not necessarily comprehensive. By taking each quote out of its larger context, some of the nuances of meaning were lost. These quotes as they stand, however, provide a greater depth of insight into each sub-section and the themes described in the thesis text.

1. “You know, I wasn’t, I’m a young individual that didn’t see the history, the way it was back then. But you read about it overall. You know, there’s always going to be a tie no matter how you look at it.” 1

2. “But it’s something that you understand as you’re growing up that it’s really an important place to the people and our ties to it.” 1, 2

3. “But to us, the mountains were given to us by the Creator. No matter where we went to camp, different areas, like north or where we do our wintering areas, we always came back to the mountains.” 1, 2, 9, 10

4. “And everything that we lived for is our mountains.” 1, 2, 7, 10

5. “And the mountains are always there because we knew they belonged to us.” 1, 2, 10

6. “I think they need the Park Service or whoever has overall say that should recognize that the Blackfeet did occupy the area more and to have more of a cultural significance to the park area as to more or less it’s USA. We’re all USA citizens, but, you know, recognize Blackfeet as who they were and that they did play a role.” 1, 16
7. “And one of the things they’re going to discover is the importance of these mountains, what they mean to us, and how I describe how, you know, for me, when I look at them, when I drive into them, they’re so awesome, so massive that you want to protect them. Before any environmentalists ever, before we even knew that term, we want to protect these mountains.” 1, 2, 7

8. “There’s cultural significance type, you know, linked to our culture because it’s our land base…cultural significance plays a big role in the livelihood of our reservation and our tribe.” 1, 2, 9

9. “Our mountains are sacred to us, very sacred. It’s just like to some people the Bible is sacred to them, and they know it’s there, that they could obtain it and read it. And that way to us our mountains, that’s the way they were to us.” 2, 8, 9

10. “You know, a lot of these guys here, these mountains are named after them, so they probably feel a lot stronger about that.” 4

11. “Stories that, you know … I don’t know all. I know some, but they definitely, there’s some, there’s a great significance that you’re going to have to…but you can’t just say it was there one time but I don’t remember it. So we got to keep that alive. So that’s the most important tie with the land and the history of it.” 1, 3, 5

12. “To me there is historical and cultural significance all over that park. I mean, the native tribe, the Blackfeet here, we’ve got a lot of cultural significance up there. A lot of mountains up there are sacred, have a lot of good medicine in them.” 1, 8

13. “The practice of hunting is in a lot of ways, helps, it’s something you do as a Blackfeet. And it’s important to you for, not just for what it provides you but for its tradition, for linking you with the past, you know.” 5, 8

14. “But we don’t just go up there just for fun and do it.” 2, 5, 6, 7

15. “People would kill to live here, and we’re sitting on a gold mine but we’re not developing it. To me that’s good too.” 7

16. “You know, the basic truth is you’ve got to have, an area like that’s, you know, it’s a beautiful area, and you can’t, you got to keep it intact.” 7

17. “And obviously, too, there is the idea that there needs to be a conservation area where things can be left alone. But, on the other hand, too, we have come to that conclusion ourselves.” 7

18. “That’s where the Blackfeet got most of their medicine was in the mountains, from the flowers and the plants and the roots. So that’s where all the plants grow were up in the mountains in the summertime. That’s where it’s always green at.” 8, 9
19. “We go up to that area, you see. And, you know, so there’s some good that goes on with our interaction with the place, you see. And I don’t know. I just can’t say enough about the place, how it profoundly affects us, you know.” 2, 6, 7, 9, 10

20. “Even right now, my (‘relative’) is in the hospital. And she lost her appetite. She couldn’t eat. So I don’t know the name of the root that they use, but they boil it. They kind of make a tea out of it. And they started bringing it up, and all of a sudden she gains her appetite back, you know. So all of that has always been a very vital part.” 6, 8, 9

21. “But he was telling me that the old people told him if you ever to seek a vision and don’t go up on XXXX Mountain, because if you go up there, you’re going to have visions that are, you’re going to have dreams and stuff that will make you want to, that’ll give you warrior traits, that you’re going to have visions of killing and, you know, just pretty much like, I guess how the Marines are brainwashed. I guess it would be, you know, that’s what kind of traits you’re going to get up there. So, and this day you don’t want to go up there.” 8, 9

22. RESEARCHER: “What is that preserving, the lack of motors?”
PARTICIPANT: “The nature of it, and for the wildlife. Nice to be able to go up there and see wildlife, and you know…they know they’re not going to be bothered.” 6, 11

23. “But I also think the park, you know, they’re doing a good job up there. They keep it nice and they keep it where it’s supposed to be a wilderness.” 7, 11

24. “Because it protects the trees. It protects the fish, the wildlife, the water, you know. It protects the things that need to be protected, I guess you could say. You know, keeps them looking good, keeps them preserved.” 6, 7, 11

25. “It’s a preserve. It’s majestic value to it. Always going to have that preservation. [As opposed to] Lewis and Clark [National Forest], you got logging roads, and stuff like that.” 7, 11

26. “I must say that they have done some good things as far as some conservation, some preservation that, of course, we didn’t have the capability to do and maybe would have had we had the same kind of resources they had access to. We could have done something like that.” 7, 11, 12

27. RESEARCHER: “You mean they’ve [places in the parkland] been renamed?”
PARTICIPANT: “Some of them have, yeah. In terms of the way the old Blackfeet referred to them. And again, we lost so much of the place names that really were significant to us, because when you have the tie to the land, the places and the place names that are in that area always have some kind of lesson, if you will.” 3, 4, 8, 9, 14

28. “Let’s say the Blackfeet were to die right now, every last one of them just disappeared, the culture itself gone. No record of it at all. You look at something like, I don’t know, Painted Teepee Mountain, and you wonder why it’s called that. Where did
that name come from? It doesn’t look like a painted teepee. But if you know the cultural
backing of the area, well hey, it kind of does. And you look at a mountain, and it could
seem like hollow, ice, desolate, cold place because there’s no spirit to it, in a sense.” 1, 4,
8, 14

29. “Fact is we own those glaciers, but they go back and they go beyond the boundary
line, you can’t go back and hunt. But yet to me, anybody else knows that we own that,
they should let em, go back and do some hunting, not kill too many animals, just enough
to get food.” 2, 6, 14

30. “He says Chief Mountain is the head. He says are you going to take this from us too?
In essence what he was saying is that you want us to conform to your ways, you want us
to, you’ve taken everything from us. Now you want to take the last thing that we have
that identifies us as Blackfeet. You want to take that from us, you know. I thought that
was a very powerful speech that he made.” 1, 2, 10, 13, 14

31. “That’s where we go for fasting. So they don’t understand that. Like XXXX, for an
example, like we go in there. And that’s like a historic site to us, too, also. That’s
another place for fasting. And they have to realize that that’s where some of our belief
started was in the mountains and in that area.” 1, 2, 8, 9, 14

32. “And before our people could just go in there and, you know. We’re not there to
disturb anything. And we don’t bother the animals.” 6, 13

33. “They react as if, to the presence of Indians as if we’re going to destroy things.
We’re going to hunt the animals to extinction. That’s horse manure.” 6, 15

34. “And I would think about that. I thought, just think, these areas were written about or
in history, and I’m riding through here. And basically they haven’t changed any, you
know.” 3, 9, 11

35. “I’d like more of a presence and more of a, maybe opportunities for school
individuals to be doing some kind of studies up there that, you know, and maybe
culturally significant related and somewhat more informative about what we know, what
we used to know about it, information for ourselves.” 5, 16

36. “See, that way there’s things that we use that are all in there. We have to sneak to get
them. I have to go up there and steal what rightfully belongs to us…And why should we
be deprived of everything that really belonged to us? See, that way we could do a lot of
things.” 2, 9, 10, 14

37. “It would be one of the best things if they returned it to the Blackfeet people, because
we do rightfully own it. And the government’s trying to take it away from us because
whatever they want to do, plant things there. And, but it’ll be like freedom. It’ll be
something that was real to us that really meant something to us to know that we got it
back, because that was part of our life. Everything up there, our hunting, our water, and
maybe we would pray for better water and people are running out of sun dance areas here. And we could, we knew everything that was identified as to the Blackfeet people.”

1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14

38. “That’s another thing that bothers me is that the white man has a tendency to look upon that as being our park. It’s a part of our public domain. You see what I mean? And you Indians are just the bugs that are getting in the way.”

1, 2, 13, 14, 15, 16

39. “Well, again, I mean, I can’t go in there and have ownership of that like I can here or even right up to the boundary of it. You know, you just feel like you don’t have the ability to go in and just be free to be there in the respect that we were there before. You know, we owned it. It was ours.”

2, 10, 14, 16

40. “Now this is only, there’s only certain areas on XXXX that you find this. This is not a universal tree either in the park or on tribal land. It’s a very specific. Now most of the people that pick this, because this is used in our ceremonies, most of the people that pick this know where it’s at. They make offerings before they pick it. This is a ceremonial harvested item. It’s gone now [from the Red Eagle Fire, 2006]. Gone. There’s none left. Alright. The selected people, the people that have the right to pick this no longer can pick it. It’s gone. What, is it gone forever? I don’t know. But it’s gone. Now no one brought that up [on park boat tour], right? The little girl [boat tour guide] is saying we’re worried about the woodpecker [from Blackfeet salvage logging] didn’t say, oh, you know, inadvertently when the park let this fire burn almost to Browning, what they did inadvertently or because of their own unwillingness to stop the fire, burnt any number of sections of ceremonial plant. They’re gone forever.”

5, 8, 9, 14, 15

41. “At this point in time if you went up there today you’d find four or five hikers I mean you’d cross four or five hikers going in there. It’s, and to go do what our old people used to do I mean as far as praying and fasting and them kind of things, it’s not possible with hikers and the trail.”

9, 14

42. “People that have a legitimate reason to harvest inside the park and who have the credentials, even academic credentials as well as community or holistic credentials to probably make a case. You know, based on early agreements, I have the right to come in here and make access.”

9, 13, 14, 15

43. “But I think the crucial question then is will the park settle on developing a positive relationship with this tribe. If not, then they certainly are denying access to people who have had this part of their homeland for thousands of years.”

1, 2, 9, 14, 15

44. “I’d like to see our land given back to us but run underneath the park…Run as a park.”

11

45. “I’d like to see it where just the Blackfeet use it and managed and kept pristine…You can allow visitors, but just the Blackfeet use certain things.”

11
46. “If the Blackfeet were to take it back, then Glacier Park would probably be all messed up. You know what I mean? Yeah, I think they would mess it all up. And there’d be no rules.” 11, 12

47. “And that’s what I would assume would happen to it is the tribe, if they had any brains at all, would make it all tribal. And not only that, they would make some kind of amendment to the Tribal Constitution that it couldn’t be owned or leased or traded for, to preserve it.” 11, 12

48. “I don’t see the tribe being in a position, even if it was feasible and possible, to handle it. No, I don’t know if they really even want to. But I would not like, I personally, myself, would not like to see the tribe in that position. I think it would add equally to the tribal woes of management. I don’t know what the budget is for Glacier National Park, but I’m sure it’s significant. And I’m sure the types of trained people that are required to operate the park are something that the tribe wouldn’t necessarily be capable of meeting. So I think the tribe, maybe to continue to request more Native Americans becoming career employees of the park and letting them move up to upper echelons, becoming in management positions is reasonable and feasible.” 11, 12

49. “And the ignorance I’m talking about David is not knowing, you know, in black and white like your paper says, that says this is ours or its yours, or there’s a lease on it, or whatever. You know, I don’t know, and I don’t pretend to know. I think you’re going to find that a lot of people don’t know.” 12

50. “You know, right now the tribe’s management practices are pitiful. They’re in need of a lot of upgrading in terms of today’s standards. And we can be there. That’s division. But today we’re not there. And we have young people growing up that do have the expertise and the vision to be just that. And the tribe, if they develop that, then we could start managing and doing a lot of things that the parks are doing now.” 12

51. “If the tribe was to manage it I think it’d get run into the ground.” 12

52. “So I believe that the Blackfeet wouldn’t, if they managed it and that’s what leans us back to education. How are we going to? We don’t have enough people to run certain stuff, so.” 12

53. RESEARCHER: “So you would be concerned about the ability of the tribe to manage the area?”
PARTICIPANT: “Yeah, to manage the area, because I know the first thing that they would do is they’re greedy. And what they would do is they would sell it to the highest bidder.” 12

54. “Wouldn't want another failure for the tribe, and have to have the park service come back in.” 12
55. “The park, in its quest to “protect,” maybe to protect and preserve, I don’t know what their motto is. It’s probably something like that. Then views unregulated human visitation as to be a danger or a threat to what they have…And the other transparent page saying, hey, it’s more important for the US Government to save this for recreation, for preserving the historic value of it. So you don’t have that right. They’re telling us we don’t.” 13, 14, 15, 16

56. “The Blackfeet people should be the one working there, the employees and watching it and handling the services, and in coordination with the US Government, because we’re still the owners of it. We’re still the owners of it, I believe. The government doesn’t own it. They took it, they leased it. And the lease is up. The lease has been up for a good ten years now I think. When was it? ’95?” 13, 15

57. “I mean, if they just gave us the hunting freedom we wanted and the fishing and all that, I’d probably pay more visits up there to do that kind of stuff.” 14

58. “Being shut out is one thing. The saddest part about it is that I know lots of little kids in Browning who have never been into the park. They have never been over Logan Pass, simply because of their, you know, there’s nobody there that has ever taken an interest to take them. Or their parents just can’t afford to take them, even though they can get in the park for free, they don’t have the gas to get through there. You know, how about bringing one of your little red buses down here in the fall and gathering some kids up and take them on a tour?” 12, 16

59. “You know, once you shut people down, you bury them and whatever you’re going to do, you put barriers around them, I guess, you know, it kind of closes their imaginations…limitations of exploring more…and you draw the line and say, well that’s not really a part of them, so. You’re not a part of that any more, and imagination plays a big role in livelihood of…the growth of just being native people, Blackfeet native people.” 9, 14, 16

60. “And basically what they’re getting at is the Indians never had anything to do with the park. They’re trying to cut them off, in a sense. Oh, they never had anything to do with it. It just became Indian land, and we bought it from them. We saved this from them. And in reality they’re the ones that kind of kept it the way it was. They kept the settlers out of here. They kept frontiersmen out of here, to an extent. You know, there’s the occasional trapper. But two or three people have no influence in comparison to thousands. And basically what the park’s trying to do is make them seem like they were stupid, like they didn’t have any involvement with it and that the government swooped in and saved the area from them. And that’s very, very degrading. That’s one of the reasons we have such communication problems with them is they want everybody to think we had nothing to do with it. The park just kind of, boom, appeared, and we were just there on the side.” 11, 13, 15, 16

61. “And cooperation and communication is a big thing between the tribe and the park. It’s something that neither one of them put up with each other. The park thinks the
tribe’s a bunch of idiots, won’t listen to them. The tribe thinks that the park is a bunch of pompous jerks. And so they don’t cooperate with them. And really what the park needs to be able to do is be a little more pliable. And the tribe needs to be a little more knowledgeable. I mean, they’re knowledgeable but not in the aspects that the park would like to see.” 12, 15

62. “I guess maybe just the Park Service in general could be more, I mean, welcome, friendly to the natives, you know. I mean, you’ve got a big website on how you can get tourists to come in. And it’s always about the tourists this, the tourists that to try to bring in money and revenue and generate interest and this and that. And it’s kind of ironic, because if they worked with the tribe more, I mean, like tourists, I don’t know, me, personally, if I’m a tourist, I like to, if I’m go somewhere, I want to meet the locals.” 14, 15, 16

63. “So they let this thing burn, and it comes across onto the reservation. And it did it twice. You know, they had a fire up on Flat Top that came down to the west side of St. Mary’s Lake about 10, 15 years ago. Burnt that all out. That hasn’t been restored. And now they burn out a huge amount of tribal timber reserve [from Red Eagle Fire, 2006]. And, again, I don’t know if there’s any compensation from them. I don’t know if there was even an apology. I don’t know that. That would be neat, it would be nice to know what the Park Service said to the tribe, you know. Oops, gee, that was a mistake. You get real subtleties. You get subtleties. From a, again, you say what is my reaction as a Native American to the park as opposed to say yours? And they’re subtle. And they’re not big booms.” 14, 15, 16

64. “Just be a little more neighborly, a phone call’s not a hard thing to do. You know and 99% of the people that have this country will go do something about them kind of things. Like I say, these guys got a book to go by, you know, but still, be a good neighbor. I mean ranchers are, if you ain’t got good neighbors you ain’t got nothing. You know and this, you’re my neighbor, you’re a big part of my neighbor right there [the park]. So a phone call wouldn’t hurt, you know. Come on down and drink my coffee, you know. It’s ok, we’ll work this out. Don’t send me a ticket [a fine] in the mail.” 15

65. “I’d say the security up there, they’re everywhere. You know, if you’re out there having a picnic and having fun and going swimming, they shouldn’t be sitting there watching you do that stuff. They should just let you have your fun. They’re too uptight up there, I think.” 15

66. “And, in fact, right there in that area, my experience is that the rangers are scared of the Blackfeet, that they’d do something against them. And I’ve seen them trying to sneak up on Indians.” 15

67. “You know to improve this relationship David, is doing just exactly what you’re doing is sitting here and drinking a little coffee. It goes a long ways, long ways. It gives me a better feeling about what you’re doing, it gives me a better feeling about, you know at least somebody’s thinking about it. You know when you put a suit on a person with a
little badge, and give them a little handbook, and say hey, this right here is, this country needs a whole lot more of...you know, I mean you can have these, I realize you guys have these open meetings you know, but this gentleman up there in front of you, you know, telling his...they’re talking at you not to you. And, standing there, they got this little intimidation thing going with their badge, but when you sit at somebody’s table and drink a little coffee you can understand them a whole lot better. You know, you know where they’re coming from. There has to be a whole lot more of that. You know, in order to ease everybody’s mind on this mountain front. You know I’d go out there and let them know that hey, we’re not bad guys, want to sit down and maybe we can do that, or maybe we can do that, all them kind of things, that’s, that would be my way of thinking.”

68. RESEARCHER: “So you haven’t really ever seen the park really try to, or park service, I should say, going into the communities, to Browning…”
PARTICIPANT: “Never. Never. And it was always, I know a source of humiliation to those employees who, I mean, they always have . . . And it’s not necessarily with the Park Service. I always get the GPI.”
RESEARCHER: “Yeah, the concessionaire.”
PARTICIPANT: “The concessionaire. But we identify that concessionaire as part of the park…and their employees, the people that I know of in, they don’t give much, if anything, about the Blackfeet except to tell people to stay away from them. And that was, it was a source of humiliation to the Indian people I knew that were going to work in the park for the summer.”

69. “But it seems that when the Blackfeet want to communicate and to cooperate and work out something, they have to knock extra loud to get the attention. And it’s not always there.”

70. “And it’s funny to me that my ancestors were part and parcel of that whole promoting the park. I mean, you look. There’s my grandma and grandpa there on my paternal side. So, again, we’ve always been tied into that park, whether it was before they ever made it into a park. Even to this day, I mean, here’s my (‘relative’) working there as a park ranger, so, you know, we’ve always had that relationship, for good or bad, with them, in my family at least. Really ingrained there with us. A lot of park stories. And that loving, hating type of relationship too…I mean, because we’re more than glad to point people into the park at our end, but they’re not giving that back to us so much to say, you know, go down to Browning and check out XXXX or go on one of the Native tours, or, you know, anything like that. So that’s discouraging that they’re not reciprocating.”

71. “But they had, what they had is some meeting in Browning, but I think, for the most part, I think we kind of scared a lot of the people off [chuckles] when they, people feel, I mean they need more interaction with what's going on, rather than just having a meeting. I mean like what you're doing here today, you know you come, and you sit down, and you want to hear what I have to say, and other people, and you're not so much interviewing as having a conversation. You have to, people need to feel relaxed or they're not going to talk. I don't know how many people were hired through these
policies, but I do feel like there should be more interaction with the tribe, and not so much with the higher echelon of the council.” 15, 16

72. “And we don’t see any Native Americans working there or we see very few. And the very few often complain that they’re under surveillance more so than their fellow non-Indian employees.” 15, 16

73. “I assume if Glacier National Park, again, decides or should decide, eh, we’ll do business as usual, they’ll continue to have the complaints of why won’t you hire our people, why don’t our students get to go in there, why don’t we have access to these things. And I suspect that will only add to their own pressures, as they claim not to have enough money to operate and things like that.” 15, 16

74. “I don’t know where the breakdown happened, where we quit having that good relationship with the park, where we were included in things, and we were happy to be included. I don’t know what became of that.” 16

75. “It doesn’t feel like there’s this welcome, open, just come on in whenever you feel like it, you know.” 16

76. RESEARCHER: “Do you feel cut off from that?”
PARTICIPANT: “In a way I do, yes. But also that I know that I don’t have to pay to go see them. You know, I could just go up there. But I might not be able to go up there and have a fasting and stay up there for three days. I know that.” 14, 16