THE CREATION OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE in 1916 fulfilled preservationists' long held dreams for a strong federal commitment to the preservation and enhancement of all national parks. In many respects, this new branch of the Interior Department resulted from a six-year political battle against the City of San Francisco's plans to dam the Tuolumne River and convert the Hetch Hetchy Valley into a huge municipal reservoir. Because Hetch Hetchy was entirely within the bounds of Yosemite National Park and possessed scenic qualities that rivaled those of the more famous valley to the south, a coalition of public officials, civic groups, and national preservationist organizations joined with John Muir and others to protest what they saw as a fundamental violation of the national park and its boundaries. Their arguments failed to overcome the powerful thirst that would dam the Tuolumne River in 1913 and continue to drive the rapid development of the San Francisco Peninsula. Nevertheless, they did inspire the creation of a new government agency solely dedicated to the management and protection of national parks.

The so-called Organic Act of 1916, which established the basic guidelines by which the National Park Service would manage its holdings, could not pull the plug on Hetch Hetchy and rescue the drowned valley. The act did promise to strengthen park boundaries, however, and declared their "fundamental purpose..."
[as the conservation] of the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein. Still, the creation of the park service reflected more than the deep emotional concerns of people like Muir, who died shortly after the loss of Hetch Hetchy. Advocates for a strong park service believed that only broad popular support, based on wide use of the parks, would ensure the agency's continued strength and growth. Consequently, the Organic Act also mandated that the new government agency "provide for the enjoyment" of visitors through the development of new accommodations.5

In practice, efforts to promote the parks as national "pleasuring grounds" far surpassed any concerns about trying to maintain them in what Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane somewhat disdainfully called an "ubridled unimpaired" condition. In a letter to Director of the National Park Service Stephen Mather, Lane encouraged him to develop the parks as a new "national playground system" that should be made accessible to the public "by any means practicable." These included the construction of roads, trails, and buildings, and active cooperation with tourist bureaus, chambers of commerce, and automobile associations.4 Moreover, as the Organic Act clearly stated, the director of the park service could also "dispose of timber" or "pro\vide . . . for the destruction of such animals and of such plant life as may be detrimental to the use of any [park]." If a tree or clump of scrubbrush blocked a certain view, for instance, it should be cut back or eliminated. Likewise, predators would have to be destroyed to increase the numbers of popular game animals like deer or mountain sheep that tourists expected to see in a national park.6

Instantly regarded as an expression of the guiding principles for the new park service, Lane's letter could not have found a more eager recipient than Stephen Mather. During his twelve-year tenure as director of the National Park Service, Mather followed an aggressive policy of park development that often led to now unthinkable proposals. At Yosemite, for instance, he championed the construction of a golf course in the valley;10 during the 1910s and 1920s, but only through their confirmation of popular white conceptions of how Indians were supposed to look and behave.8 Basket judging and the sales of native crafts, for example, took place in front of crudely constructed canvas tepees. One year, in an attempt to lend some authenticity to the events, Don Tresidder, president of the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, even purchased a wagon from a group of Indians in Oregon. The traditional Miwok aumal, a conical structure made of long park slats, apparently reminded him too much of the Yosemite Indian village, which he regarded as an unpleasant eyesore that failed to satisfy expectations of native culture and life.9

Besides basketry and beadwork competitions, the 1924 Indian Field Days included a parade, rodeo events, an Indian Baby Show, and horse races featuring bareback riders "striped as Warriors." To encourage native participation in these events, park officials paid each man registered $1; every "squad" appearing in "full Indian costume of backskin dress, moconnia, and bead decoration," garnished wholly foreign to Sierra Miwok culture, received $2.50. The winners of "Best Indian Warrior costume" and "Best Indian Squaw costume" received $21 each.10 Similar contests with similar incentives were a standard feature of all Field Days, and insofar as native people were encouraged to practice their "games and industries" in all the park service and concessionaires expected them to fulfill popular conceptions of what Indians supposedly did.11

Along with promoting such stereotypical presentations of native culture, park officials strongly reined in certain behavior as unacceptable. At the Indian Field Days of 1924, for instance, those attending the rededication of the Yosemite chapel heard a commotion from a group of Indians in the midst of a tug-of-war game a short distance away. A ranger rushed over from the chapel, ordered them to stop, and, because some had been excelling betting on the contest, chastised them for gambling in a national park. A number of spokespeople for the Yosemite described the event in a letter addressed to the chief ranger: "The Indians were playing Tug-o-war[,] the first game no one interfered, the second game Mr. Mather rushed in, and said no gambling in Yosemite National Park and ordered the Indians to leave this minute."12 From subsequent correspondence among park officials it is not clear whether Director Mather, who participated in the chapel dedication, was the person who ordered the Indians to leave. Nevertheless, they certainly perceived Days, a festivity designed to "revive and maintain [the] interest of Indians in their own games and industries, particularly basketry and bead work." The Field Days also encouraged visitation to Yosemite during the late summer, when waterfalls had either diminished to unspectacular trickles or dried up altogether, Any effort to represent or honor native culture, it seemed, must necessarily take place within concerns about attracting park visitors and providing for their enjoyment.7
the ranger's orders as representing the full authority of the National Park Service and resumed the considerable attention park officials placed on this minor incident. Indeed, the tug-of-war game generated a surprisingly large body of correspondence among national park administrators and rangers, who eventually decided that the Indians would not be fined for gambling but must be further informed of park regulations and the consequences of ignoring them. Along with gambling, park officials did not tolerate drinking or theft among native people or tourists. The penalties for Indians, however, were especially severe. In December 1941, Alvis Brown and Lawrence Earl, both twenty-one years old, were charged with theft and "sentenced to" a Bureau of Indian Affairs school in Carson City, Nevada. A month later, fifteen-year-old Lawrence Dick received the same punishment for the same transgression and soon found himself almost three hundred miles from home and family.13 Though attendance at government boarding schools was fairly typical for most Indian youths at this time, students frequently viewed their education as prolonged ostracization and punishment. Julia Parker, a Kashia Poms woman who moved into the Yosemite Indian village after marrying Ralph Parker and losing her family there in the 1940s, met her husband at a Bureau of Indian Affairs school in Carson City, Nevada. "Boss Indians Around School," as she and her friends called it, was a place where native children were told to deny their heritage and trained to be "a person who was just a servant."14

Besides sending Indians out of Yosemite and placing them under the authority of another government agency, park officials also meted out their own punishments within the valley. In April 1926, for instance, park rangers arrested Virgil Brown for drunk driving and held him in the park jail for thirty days, an especially severe punishment for the time, and then burned him from the park. Always a favorite pastime with the Yosemite and many other American Indian groups, gambling was often an integral part of social gatherings. Nevertheless, the park service prohibited gambling, and after the tug-of-war incident rangers rigorously enforced this ban among the valley's native residents. As a 1928 Big Time, an annual summer celebration among the Yosemite and surrounding communities, park rangers arrested and fined Wesley Wilson for gambling with a "man and two Indian women." Neither the man, who was apparently white, nor the two women received even a lesser fine.15

Restrictions on Indians could also be accompanied by well-intentioned patronizing Park administrators often acted as unofficial Indian agents and arranged for the health of the valley's native residents. Parity to encourage participation in the Field Days, the park service also worked in conjunction with the California Bureau of Child Hygiene to provide a "well baby" checkup for participants in the Indian Baby Contest.16 In 1930, when a seventy-two-year-old Yosemite man named Charlie Dick became too ill from tuberculosis for successful treatment at the valley clinic, Superintendent Charles Thomson arranged for his care in the town of Coulterville.17 Although Dick paid for his own care, he apparently did not realize that he was doing so because Yosemite officials had long withheld part of his wages, without informing him, for just such a medical emergency.18 In another instance involving money, however, Assistant Superintendent E. B. Leavitt helped Maggie Howard with a number of problems she had with the Bank of Italy in Merced.19 Though these examples illustrate a sometimes benevolent interest in the welfare of the Yosemite, they were part of the omnipresent and intrusive role that park officials increasingly played in the Indian community.

In a strange and unsettling way, these efforts to control the valley's native population had strong parallels with other aspects of park management. Much as the Indian Field Days fit within a larger emphasis on making the national parks into places of recreation and entertainment, the restrictions placed on the Yosemite Indians also reflected the methods used to control the tourists' experience of the park's environment. The studied placement of scenic roadside overlooks, the cutting of timber to enhance certain views, and the tight management of animal populations were all designed to create what historian Richard Saines has called "the scenic facade of nature, the principal basis for public enjoyment."20 Whenever the behavior of native people infringed on the "facade" that park managers wished to create, their actions were sharply circumscribed. Of course, if particular activities like the Indian Field Days contributed to the public's enjoyment of the park, then a native presence was strongly encouraged. As a general rule, however, park officials preferred to keep Indians outside the tourists' gaze. After the end of the last Field Days in 1929, for instance, they en...
tended a plan for encouraging a "thickening of undergrowth" near the Indian village to "segregate [it] from [the] public as desired."27 Out of night was not necessarily out of mind, however, and park officials seemed to view the entire native community as a potential problem that needed constant watch. Certain behaviors might be kept in check, much like a tree that threatened to block an especially photogenic vista, but some Indians, as young Lawrence Dick learned, could not be made to fit the park's management scheme. Like those bears that "misbehaved" in the park, any village residents who acted in a socially unacceptable manner would be banished from their homes in the valley.

Despite such encroachment into their lives, the Yosemite Indians successfully adapted to changing conditions in the park and, whenever possible, exploited them to their own advantage. At the turn of the century, for instance, they lived in six small encampments from spring through fall but gradually merged into one larger village. This change strengthened the community as a whole and better accommodated the Indians to Yosemite's ever increasing tourist development. As Lowell Bean and Sylvia Brakke Vane have noted, such an important social change took place along "traditional lines, and community leaders continued "to maintain older religious and political structures" as they worked to bring native life into accord with new developments. Such qualities proved essential through the 1910s and 1920s, and the valley's native community managed to ignore a certain level of outside intrusion as they successfully adapted to new developments.28

While the Yosemite affirmed long-established social structures, they apparently had no qualms about participating in the cultural novelties of the Indian Field Days. Local basket weavers looked forward to matching their skills with those of neighboring women, and the festivities drew a large number of customers for their wares. Likewise, the rodeo provided a public arena for Yosemite men to test their riding skills—and proposed the development of a new village in "an Indian character design . . . thereby making . . . [it] a very presentable thing." Such a plan would not only satisfy the expectations of tourists but also promised to quiet a string of recent complaints from visitors about the unseemly poverty of many native houses.29

What such a design entailed was not altogether clear, but it certainly did not include improvements that the Yosemite might propose. While redesigning his old house in the village, Harry Johnson learned from park officials that he would have to cease construction because his additions were "too conspicuous from the road . . . and lacked the proper architectural lines." Johnson's house apparently did not look "Indian" enough to the administrators, and community leaders continued to "maintain older religious and political structures" as they worked to bring native life into accord with new developments. Such qualities proved essential through the 1910s and 1920s, and the valley's native community managed to ignore a certain level of outside intrusion as they successfully adapted to new developments.28

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Superintendent Lewis hoped the Bureau of Indian Affairs would help finance the proposed new Indian village and encouraged its contribution to the village's planning and implementation. Unfortunately for Lewis, the response of L. A. Dorrington, superintendent of Indian Affairs in Sacramento, was even colder than that given park officials some thirteen years earlier. Because the people who lived within Yosemite National Park had not signed treaties with the United States, Dorrington reminded Lewis, the Indian Service could not directly aid the development of the new village or contribute to the support of the Yosemite Indians.30 In an apparent effort to soften this rejection and stave off any further requests, Dorrington did confide to the commissioner of Indian Affairs that he at least expected to take certain salutary measures that would make park officials "think and feel the problem is theirs and that we are helping solve it."31 Despite the refusal and perhaps believing that some support from the Indian Service might still be forthcoming, Lewis moved ahead with Yosemite's master plan and set out to determine how best to incorporate native people into the proposed improvements to park facilities.

As Lewis had informed Dorrington and others, the park service felt it necessary to limit the number of Indians living in the park to those individuals of "the original Yosemite band or their descendants."32 After conducting the first in a series of Indian village censuses to determine who could remain in the valley, park officials apparently decided to extend these criteria to a slightly larger group of people. This may have occurred because Lewis and his successors tended, on the
one hand, to favor a number of individuals who might not qualify as "true" Yosemite Indians—namely, popular basket weavers like Maggie Howard and Lucy Tellez, who were both of mixed Mono-Paite and Sierra Miwok ancestry. On the other hand, park officials had expressed a strong resentment toward some residents like Virgil and Alvis Brown, who were both descendents of important Abawakwahaek tribe leaders. By the beginning of 1929, then, the park service qualified their criteria for Indian residence, ruling that those individuals presently living in the village would remain only if they had established "a right to do so, either through being natives of Yosemite Valley or because of their long residence [here]."

Much as they had qualified the basis on which native residence would continue, park officials soon equivocated on their definition of a "right" to live in the valley. By the summer of 1929, the issue had been thoroughly studied, and Lewis's successor, Superintendent Charles Thomson, met with the Indians in the village to "impress upon them in a proper way, that their residence [in the valley] was a privilege, and not a vested right; and that this privilege was dependent upon proper deportment." He also told them that certain people, namely "the Yosemite Indians . . . and the Mono and other Indians who [had been in the park] for years and years[,] . . . had a 'moral right' to remain in the valley." Nevertheless, he warned that "it would prove to be in the best interests of the Government to build houses and assign them, if it will [park officials] absolute control of the Indian Village.

For Thomson, the issue of control was paramount. "If anyone was constantly breaking a regulation," he told the assembled Indians, "did not want to work reasonably steady, cannot get along with his neighbors, or in any way prove to be a poor member of the Village . . . he would have to go away and give up his house." Furthermore, anyone who could not find work in the park during the fall and winter months would have to leave as well. As Thomson well knew, almost no one, white or Indian, worked in the valley during these months. Hence, Thomson's "absolute control of the Indian Village" did not simply mean a regulation, "a rule ought to remove the Yosemite Indians as less than "desirable citizens of any community," as he noted in a "Special Report on the Indian Situation" to National Park Service Director Horace M. Albright, and felt "they should have long since been banished from the Park." According to Thomson, their "election" would bring a number of great benefits: "it would make administration simpler; would eliminate the eyesore of the Indian village . . . and, following the elimination of private land holdings [on the western perimeter of the park], would remove the final influence operating against a pure status for Yosemite." Thomson believed that removal would also benefit the Yosemite Indians because it would "tend to break them up as a racial unit and, in time, to diffuse their blood with the great American mass."

Despite all these advantages, the superintendent still had to recommend against a concerted effort to remove the Yosemite from the park. "While their election might be the simple and easy solution," Thomson ultimately declared that he was "opposed to it." As the recent experience with Collet had proven, such a policy would raise a "storm of criticism [from the Indians and their allies] . . . that could hardly be withstood." Nevertheless, he was under considerable pressure to develop a solution to a problem that he felt could "not be tolerated much longer." Thomson had received requests from several government agencies, and construction on the site of the Indian village was imminent. With short-term needs and long-term goals in mind, Thomson proposed a middle course that would give park officials unprecedented control of Yosemite's native community while, over time, achieve the full removal of Indians from the park through a process so gradual that it would not draw any adverse publicity.

Toward a Final Solution

Thomson's report became the definitive statement on park policy toward the Yosemite Indians and received enthusiastic support from both Albright and the Yosemite Board of Expert Advisors, a nongovernmental group established to advise Yosemite administrators on matters of policy and development. Although Thomson exhibited considerable disdain for the park's native residents, he believed their presence in the valley placed an "obligation upon those charged with the handling of backward peoples." Moreover, their "historical association with Yosemite makes them very significant to the Park, to drive them out would
result in an ethnological loss comparable to the loss...that our deer would mean to our fauna exhibit." Because some native residents were popular with visitors, "especially Easterners," Thomson also agreed with an advisory board recommendation for a native exhibit.34 "The Indians, specifically Easterners," Thomson continued, "especially Easterners," Thomson also agreed with an advisory board recommendation for a native exhibit.34 "The Indians, especially Easterners," Thomson continued, would certainly fit the park service's goal of presenting a "surgical facade of nature." In doing so, the proposed exhibit would also mark a sharp turn away from the more commercial qualities of the Indian Field Days. Not surprisingly, the same Board of Expert Advisors that encouraged the development of the "aboriginal style" presentation also roundly criticized the Field Days as "a white man's [entertainment], in which some part is taken by Indians to whose Yosemite forebears such things are wholly unknown." Of course, the new goal was not to make native people less entertaining or interesting but to present them in a more "authentic" manner. Thomson fervently agreed and hoped the relocation of the new Indian village to a more secluded location in the park would also prevent its residents from maintaining their "tendencies toward professionalizing—fortune telling, fake Indian dances, etc., for fees."35

As they created a program for dealing with Yosemite's native community, park officials were also guided by a newly developing preservationist ethic. Beginning in the mid-1920s, biologists like Joseph Grinnell at the University of California and George M. Wright of the National Park Service sharply criticized any policy that placed the development of roads and hotels above ecological concerns. Focusing on wildlife management, which mainly consisted of predator reduction and feeding programs, Wright and two colleagues began a study in 1930 that advocated the restoration of park environments to their "pristine state."40 Published three years later as Essays of the National Parks of the United States, the study represented the first serious effort to move the park service away from the development of tourist amenities and toward a focus on the Organic Act's stipulation of "a pure status for Yosemite."41

Indeed, Thomson's program for gradual removal of the Yosemite Indians. The banning of native hunting and the suppression of Indian-caused fires in the late nineteenth century had already gone a long way toward making both the valley and the surrounding high country into the type of well-wooded, game-rich landscapes that park officials and tourists preferred. The real problem, it seemed, now derived from the simple fact of residence.46

Of course, as Thomson informed Albright in his 1930 "Special Report," the "pure status of Yosemite" could not be achieved overnight. Nevertheless, construction of the new Indian village would give the park service tremendous leverage over the Indian population within the valley; "the Superintendent could prevent the influx of outside Indians and, by the device of cancellation of lease of those abusing the privilege of residence, he could maintain a discipline now impossible." Furthermore, Indians would have to pay rent, and those who fell delinquent in their payments or were absent from their homes for too long would forfeit their residences in the valley. Those gainfully employed by either the park service or one of the concessionaires could remain in the new Indian village, but all were to be retireable employees. And once retired, they had no right to remain in the valley—moral or otherwise. Ultimately, the native presence in the valley would cease to be a problem because it would eventually take care of itself through a process of attrition.47

The park service began construction of the new village in 1931, and six cabins were finished by mid-November. Mindful of native protests and fears about the loss of their ancient village site, Thomson "kept entirely away from the Indians until construction was finished," keeping them in suspense as to our plans. "As good luck would have it," he informed Director Albright, "their completion coincided almost exactly with the onset of a bad storm." Because "a foot of snow and very cold weather made the cabins even more attractive...[he] called a general meeting of the Indians" and informed them of their imminent move. Though some Yosemite leaders protested in a "suspicious and hard-boiled" manner, the families selected to live in the new cabins quickly gathered their belongings the following morning and "moved in very fast as if they feared that park officials might change their minds."48

Although most members of the Yosemite Indian community would remain in their old homes for another few years, the last residents finally moved into the new housing units in 1935. When completed, the new site contained twelve cabins...
The addition of three more buildings for a work by only of the new village population of the surrounding country.

Working in the valley, other criteria tended to be more important than ancestry and more on "usefulness to the community; length of service denied Jim Rust a place in the new village because he "had no connection with the discovery" of his previous trips outside the Indian Village stand in Yosemite was more significant than the Yosemite Indian community's moral right to remain in the valley when the last of his people left. The end of the Yosemite Indians, then, would mean the end of the valley."

Although he was born in Yosemite, where most of his family continued to live, and descended from people born in the valley before 1850, Parker was not considered a "local" because his most recent residence had been near Mono Lake. Consequently, any employment he obtained in the valley should be viewed as a favor, not a right. The explanation apparently satisfied the commissioner of Indian Affairs, and he informed Parker that any complaints against the park service were entirely unjustified. Of course, Parker's family viewed matters differently, and his inability to se-
cure regular work signaled a threat to the entire community. If a recognized member could not return, then any temporary departure from the valley might prove permanent. Movement in and out of the area, as well as incorporation of individuals from neighboring groups, was a vital dynamic that had long shaped Yosemite Indian life. Now the park service had defined people like David Parker as part of a “large miscellany of Indians living in surrounding counties who naturally would like to be included into the advantageous status of our Yosemite group of Indians.” Parker’s complaint was shortly followed by another, but park officials apparently saw no reason to follow up on the matter. The park service’s control of housing and employment in the new Indian village, as well as the recent vote of confidence from the commissioner of Indian Affairs, made their position unsatisfactory.57

While the likes of Parker might be put off, Thomson’s efforts to create a “pure status” for Yosemite National Park did not take effect as rapidly as he might have liked. As he noted in a letter to the director of the National Park Service in July 1933, the Yosemite Indians provided “a reservoir of almost efficient labor at which the park service and concessionaires could draw,” and rapid attrition of workers would have been counterproductive.58 A certain balance had to be struck between the labor needs of the park, the desire to eliminate the native population altogether, and a fear that any sharp drop in the number of people residing in the Indian village might be construed as forced removal. Whether by design or simple prejudice, park officials found their solution in a policy of casual neglect. Throughout the 1930s, they regularly failed to assist with the maintenance of the new village, even as rents increased, and continually ignored earlier promises to give Indians first consideration for park employment. While part of an ongoing effort to prevent an “influx of other Indians moving in... to favorable living conditions” in the valley, ignoring the concerns of the park’s native community nicely within Thomson’s original plan. As the superintendent had informed a group of U.S. senators who visited the park in the summer of 1932, “he did not want to encourage permanent residence in the park” but instead the condition of the village to foster a “tendency... to drift away” from the valley.59 As employment in the park became more difficult to obtain, individuals and families moved out of the valley to adjacent areas in Mariposa County. Despite new births within the Yosemite Indian community, the population of the village had been halved by the early 1940s, and many of the remaining residents were slated for retirement in the coming years.60 As Jay Johnson recalls his years growing up in the valley, the people who continued to live in the Indian village deeply felt and resented the control that park officials wielded over their lives. Even those secure in their employment and residence had to contend with a growing list of regulations over personal conduct, the appearance of their homes, and the care of their children.61

Conditions in the valley only worsened for the Yosemite Indian community in the years following World War II. Park officials nearly tripled the rent in 1947 yet declined to make a commensurate increase in the services they provided to the Indian village. After a series of complaints from residents forced some concessions from the park service, relations between the two groups became increasingly antagonistic. Whether the result of protests from the entire community or the product of increased surveillance, park officials recorded large increases in the number of Indians cited for violating park regulations. A supposed inability to respect authority seemed only part of the problem, and the Yosemite were accused of not being “true” Indians. Besides acquitting many of the accusations of modern society, the Yosemite’s “blood-line” had become “very thin” through intermarriage. Consequently, bad behavior and corrupted blood meant the Yosemite Indians no longer possessed any moral right to live in the valley. As historian Stella Marsh has noted, these conclusions would soon inspire the park service to take steps that would accelerate the demise of the Indian village.62 Conflict and hardship also tended to strengthen the Yosemite Indian community, and no one had any desire to leave the village. In fact, a number of individuals who served in the armed forces or took jobs in the burgeoning defense industries returned to Yosemite in the years after the war. Marriages and births also brought new members into the community, and by 1953 the year-round population of the village had climbed to form. The valley also remained a focus of Indian life in the region, and residents continued to host “feeds” and “gatherings” on a regular basis. While a new generation learned songs, dances, and stories at these events, Yosemite elders also imparted a deep respect for their homes in the valley. Tensions between the Indian community and the park service only heightened this connection to Yosemite, and native elders encouraged their people to view residence in the valley as a cultural necessity.63

The small increase in the number of people living in the Indian village, and the fact that almost half were under the age of twenty-one, caused park officials to fear that Yosemite’s “Indian problem” would continue to escalate indefinitely unless strict measures were adopted. In the summer of 1951, the park service developed the Yosemite Indian Village Housing Policy, which stipulated that only permanent government employees could remain with their families in the village. Those who did not meet this single qualification received notice to leave the valley in four weeks. Once vacated, their homes were destroyed to prevent any members of the growing families that still remained in the valley from taking up residence.64

Superintendent Charles Thomson had once faced a public outcry against wholesale eviction, but park officials in the 1950s could view their actions in light of new developments in federal Indian policy. Much like the government’s effort to “terminate” its relations with Indian tribes in the 1950s, the park service now argued that Indian removal from Yosemite would prove a blessing to the valley’s native inhabitants: residence in the national park had sustained the Yosemite Indian community, but in the process it retarded an individual’s ability to join the mainstream of American society. They expected that the Yosemite Indians, forced to live without the watchful direction of the National Park Service, would shed their collective identity and learn to fend for themselves. As Congress declared to Indian tribes across the country, park officials believed their new plans would allow each Yosemite Indian to finally enjoy “the same privileges and re
sponsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the United States, to end their status as wards of the United States, and to grant them all of the rights and privileges pertaining to American citizenship.\(^5\)

Park officials rightly gauged public opinion, and implementation of the new policy elicited no appeals on behalf of the valley's native inhabitants. Unable to marshal an effective resistance on its own, the residents of the Yosemite Indian community were forced to comply with a government agency that now seemed to possess almost total control over their lives. Whenever a head of household died or retired, the park service never failed to issue an order to vacate the park. As each successive family left its home in the valley, the remaining residents of the Indian village could only watch as park employees destroyed or removed each newly vacated cabin. By 1969, only a few structures remained, and the last residents were relocated to a government housing area for park employees. Abandoned and dilapidated, the Indian house village soon vanished in the flames of a firefighting practice session.\(^6\)

In the years following the fiery destruction of the Indian village, the park service managed to erase almost all signs of habitation. A few traces of the Indian village still remain, however: a fire hydrant that stood near the common garage seems mysteriously out of place in the middle of a campground popular with climbers, gentle conifers and small holes made from the preparation of acorns adorn some unnoticed and out-of-the-way pondering areas; a number of cultivated plants have escaped efforts to return the area to its "natural state." Small testimonials to almost forty years of habitation, these signs betray a longer history of adaptation and persistence that continues to shape the Indian people of Yosemite. Shortly after the final demise of the village, the Yosemite Indians reorganized themselves as the American Indian Council of Mariposa County (AICMC). Dedicated to strengthening older cultural practices and establishing official relations with the federal government, the AICMC has reinforced the connections between old residents of the valley with other native groups in the area. Together, they have asserted a cultural claim to Yosemite National Park that has allowed native people to regain some access to the valley and its resources.\(^7\)

No longer residents in the national park, the Yosemite still have a close connection with their ancestral home, and many frequent the valley to gather acorns, celebrate the annual Big Times, and maintain traditional religious practices. The tremendous amount of tourist development in the park has compromised much of Yosemite's environment, however, and recent park service efforts to repair the damage have occasionally resulted in tighter restrictions on native utilization of park resources. Though Indian uses did not produce the current problems in the park, their ancestry of adaptation and persistence that continues to shape the Indian people of Yosemite.\(^8\)

Almost seventy years ago, Superintendent Thomson felt that the government had "solved a perplexing problem and would have no other task with the Yosemite except to prevent the influx of other Indians into these favorable living conditions." By establishing a plan through which the Yosemite would eventually be forced to leave the valley, and by segregating those who remained from more commonly visited areas of the park, Thomson achieved a solution to an issue that had bothered officials since the establishment of Yosemite National Park in 1890. The subsequent construction of a sanitized ethnological exhibit depicting pre-gold rush Indian culture further restricted the Yosemite Indians' visible presence in the valley and effectively contributed to a historical fiction still maintained by the National Park Service in its literature on Yosemite and most other national parks. Indians were the first "visitors" to park areas, who, for a variety of reasons, decided not to visit these lands sometime in the distant past, and, at least in the case of Yosemite, "real" Indians ceased to be a visible presence in the area long before the establishment of the national park.\(^9\)

With the Indian "problem" solved and Yosemite no longer an anomaly in the national park system, such fictions have become further embedded in popular conceptions of national parks and wilderness. Americans look at an Ansel Adams photograph of Yosemite and see more than a national symbol. They see an image of a pristine wilderness, an empty, uninhabited, primordial landscape that has been preserved in the state that God first intended it to be. Ironically, when Adams took his most famous photographs a sizable native community still lived in Yosemite—the descendants of the same people whose habitation of the valley in the mid-nineteenth century qualified Yosemite as a true wilderness in the minds of many Americans. What Adams's photographs obscure and what tourists, government officials, and environmentalists fail to remember is that uninhabited landscapes had to be created.

If Yosemite National Park teaches us anything, it is that scenes of great permanence are fraught with historical change. With every change, however, it seems there is always an ending and a new beginning. In late December 1996, the last Yosemite Indian to reside in the national park left his birthplace for a new home in the community of Mariposa. Jay Johnson, the eldest son of Harry Johnson and the grandson of Bridgeport Tom, had retired the previous July from his position as a forester with the National Park Service. In accordance with the Yosemite Indian Village Housing Policy of 1953, he and his family had to leave their home by the end of the year. On New Year's Day, Johnson's grandfather's old prophecy seemed to come true: a huge storm roared through the central Sierra Nevada, the raging Merced River tore through park structures, and huge rocks fell thousands of feet before smashing onto the Floyded valley floor.\(^10\)

The storms of January 1997 may have been only a warning. Johnson, his family, and members of the AICMC still regard Yosemite as their home, and all have struggled to maintain a connection to the valley. Consequently, they place great importance on a number of agreements with the park service that allow them to at least continue their ceremonial use of the park area. Most significantly, a recent compact between the National Park Service and the AICMC to convert the last village site into an Indian cultural center promises to greatly strengthen the native presence in Yosemite. Unlike the historical displays behind the Yosemite Museum, the new center would celebrate and foster the continuing vitality of the Yosemite Indian community. Moreover, the area will provide a per-
manent space for ceremonies and social gatherings that participants can choose to close to outside visitors. According to Johnson, the practice of certain rituals has long "kept things in balance," and the new cultural center will help to maintain the connection between his people and the place that has long sustained them. But Johnson warns that if access to the old village site is ever denied and the ceremonies could not take place there or elsewhere in the valley, "then watch out" for the true realization of Bridgeport Tom's prophecy.7

CONCLUSION

Exceptions and the Rule

John Muir once declared that true lovers of wilderness enjoy a "close and confiding union with [Nature]." Having defined, created, and preserved the object of these affections, Muir and his friends could certainly lay a special claim to America's uninhabited wilderness parks. It is no great trick to love one's own creation, however, and scholars have recently begun to recognize a certain degree of narcissism in American conceptions of wilderness. For those native peoples who found themselves excluded from national park areas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the cultural construction of wilderness was already old history. As Luther Standing Bear observed in the early 1910s, "Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness,' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame." Likewise, a contemporary of Standing Bear's, Iktomi Lila Sica, characterized park service claims that Indians had not used preserved wilderness areas in the past as "ridiculous propaganda."2 Long before Luther Standing Bear or Iktomi Lila Sica reached adulthood, Shoshone, Bannock, and Crow people clearly understood the exclusive nature of wilderness and its appreciation, as would the Blackfeet and Yosemite a short while later. In time, the mostly unwritten experiences and resentments of these peoples would inspire later generations to challenge their continued exclusion from national park lands.