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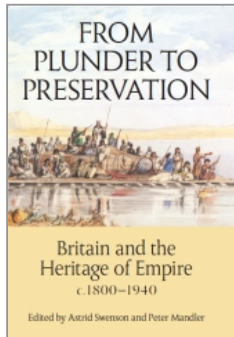

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Dying Americans

Race, Extinction, and Conservation in the New World

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[-] Abstract and Keywords

Early modern writers had long noted the apparent decimation of some indigenous peoples. However, such discussions took on a new and urgent form in the nineteenth century as a new scientific understanding of extinction as an endemic natural process was established. Many scholars have explored the notion of dying races in histories of colonial contact, modern land rights, or genocide; yet most have overlooked the new epistemological status of extinction as a mechanism for explaining natural change. This chapter explores how this scientific shift became combined with notions of wilderness in the American context to rationalize policies of Indian dispossession, forced removal from their traditional homelands, and the establishment of the world's first national parks. In doing so, it highlights fruitful directions for future histories of heritage, endangerment, and conservation.

Keywords: national parks, Yellowstone, Indian policy, extinction, George Catlin, wilderness, endangered races

LAMENTING THE PREDICAMENT of dying races became an increasingly prominent preoccupation in the long nineteenth century. Novelists, painters, scientists, politicians, poets, travel writers, and missionaries all contributed to creating and perpetuating the sense that some peoples were doomed, perhaps even providentially predestined, to a speedy extinction. Early modern writers had long noted the apparent decimation of some indigenous peoples; however, such discussions took on a new and urgent form in the nineteenth century. Although many scholars have explored the notion of dying races in histories of settler colonialism, modern land

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rights, or genocide, many have overlooked the new epistemological status of extinction as a mechanism for explaining natural change.

Whilst early modern writers mourned the remnants of past peoples, in the 1800s commentators were able to appeal to a new scientific understanding of extinction: that is to say, a view of the natural world in which extinction was not only plausible but was often viewed as an endemic feature of natural change. Once established, the reality of extinction quickly informed how the relationship between humans and their environment was conceived and underpinned choices about what or who should be privileged enough to be conserved. In some cases, the perceived threat mobilized campaigners to petition for conservation measures to protect indigenous peoples. Yet others cast endangered peoples as the necessary victims of human racial competition, in which case their expected demise was both mourned and celebrated, and sometimes actively pursued. This chapter explores how this new understanding of human endangerment became combined with notions of wilderness in the American context to rationalize policies of Indian dispossession, forced removal from their traditional homelands, and the establishment of the world’s first national parks. Starting with the shifting epistemological status of extinction in the early decades of the 1800s, the chapter highlights how extinction **(p. 268)** came to be used to explain the nature of intercultural contact, its relationship to shifting federal Indian policy, and the foundation of the national parks. In doing so, it suggests that humans need to be reintegrated into histories of heritage as both the agents and subjects of environmental change. After all, this was a period during which indigenous peoples shifted from being seen as elements of the natural environment to being characterized as its destroyers. Revealingly, in conservationist circles the emphasis shifted from protecting endangered peoples within their homelands to excluding them in order to privilege flora and fauna. This approach builds on a considerable body of work in which each of these themes is well known; however, in bringing them together, the intention is to highlight fruitful directions for future histories of heritage, endangerment, and conservation.

I

The notion that colonized societies were somehow dying out in the face of contact with white settlers was well established before the nineteenth century. Thomas Jefferson’s well-known *Notes on the state of Virginia*, first written in 1781 but only publicly circulated in revised form in 1787, speculated:

> What would be the melancholy sequel of their [Indian] history, may however be argued from the census of 1669; by which we discover that the tribes therein enumerated were, in the space of 62 years, reduced to about one-third of their former numbers. Spirituous liquors, the small-pox, war and an abridgement of territory, to a people who lived principally on the spontaneous productions of nature, had committed terrible havock among them, which generation, under the obstacles opposed to it among them, was not likely to make good.[1]

Jefferson’s statistics exaggerated the depletion, since the census he used only included warriors, not the entire population.[2] Nonetheless, in many senses, the fear of imminent loss was well founded, as numerous human societies found themselves ravaged by the new diseases, territorial dispossession, warfare, and genocide due to violent intercultural contact and imperial

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ambition, particularly expansive settler colonialism.[3] Significantly, the explanatory causes invoked **(p.269)** in discussions of human endangerment changed as naturalists' understandings of extinction were transformed in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Although the disappearance of flora and fauna was hardly unknown, these had been caused by human actions; explaining the loss of species within the context of endemic natural change proved more difficult. Most infamously, the case of the Mauritian dodo, a flightless bird exterminated through hunting in the seventeenth century, indicated the potential for human devastation. However, accepting extinction as a feature of the natural world posed several difficulties throughout the eighteenth century. For many theists and deists alike, the possibility of extinction appeared to undermine the perfection one might expect of a natural world designed by a Supreme Being. Moreover, it contradicted the notion of natural plenitude: the widely accepted proposition that all possible forms of existence, whether living or not, had existed and would continue to do so in order to assure that Creation exhibited the full range of its diversity at any given moment. Accepting, or claiming, that extinction was an endemic feature of natural change 'could therefore seem tantamount to supporting an atheistic view of the world, in which there was no providence, no design, and no plenitude'.[4]

For those unconcerned by the theological ramifications, migration and transmutation appeared to provide plausible explanatory mechanisms for extinction. Naturalists were fundamentally aware that much of the world's flora and fauna remained uncatalogued or even undiscovered. Thus it seemed entirely possible that animals that appeared to be extinct, such as fossilized megafauna, might roam in as yet untrodden lands or in the depths of the oceans. (After all, Jefferson's *Notes on the state of Virginia* famously proposed that megafauna might yet be found wandering in the western terra incognita.) Although much more rarely relied upon, the final option offered the possibility that, rather than disappearing, natural forms had transmuted into their present form. Thus, in the early nineteenth century, the 'three explanations were treated as alternatives, as it were on a par with one another'. Extinction, migration, and transmutation (or, in modern parlance, evolution) all provided viable alternatives, and none was 'obviously more plausible than the others. Each entailed grave difficulties and further problems.'[5]

As an explanation of natural change, extinction gained considerable ground in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in light of the work of the French comparative anatomist Georges Cuvier. Appointed in the wake of the French Revolution to the newly formed Musée d'histoire naturelle in Paris, Cuvier quickly established himself as the premier authority on fossils **(p.270)** and functionalist comparative anatomy. Most famously, he developed the notion of the 'correlation of parts' to argue that animals' internal assemblages were interdependent; thus, even with fragmentary empirical evidence in hand, such as a handful of bones, Cuvier felt able to make educated guesses regarding the overall structure of the entire animal. Based on this method, in 1796 Cuvier published a paper comparing the remains of a fossil elephant to living examples of both Asian and African elephants, and suggested that the fossil elephant was both a distinct species and extinct.[6] The paper became the first of several examining fossilized remains, including a second look at elephants and an offering on the mastodon in 1806.[7] Such detailed research increasingly appeared irrefutable and thus helped establish extinction as a reality.

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Accepting extinction as an endemic natural process had significant repercussions for discussions of intercultural encounter, since theories of extinction were quickly used to explain, and even rationalize, human population decimations. For instance, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century stadial theories of human development proposed that humanity passed from 'savagery' to 'civilization' based on changes in modes of subsistence; four distinctive stages, usually defined by hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and, finally, commerce, were each associated with given practices of social, political, and civil organization as well as manners and morals.[8] In these schemes, indigenous societies would inevitably disappear as people were assimilated into settler society and so progressed onto ostensibly higher stages of human development. Alternatively, some argued indigenous peoples were fixed in their nature or so closely tied to the environments in which they lived that they were incapable of improvement and, unless removed or protected, would inevitably fall by the wayside.[9]

Over the course of the nineteenth century it became increasingly expedient to explain the fate of peoples identified as doomed in terms of racialized differences; in this guise, extinction became a necessary by-product that would be observed wherever different human varieties met, and might even be pursued through attempts at active extermination. For instance, in 1864 the anthropologist Richard Lee presented a paper for the Anthropological Society of London (f. 1863) in which he argued that:

> The rapid disappearance of aboriginal tribes before the advance of civilisation is one of the many remarkable incidents of the present age. In every new country, from America to New Zealand, from Freemantle to Honolulu, it is observable, and seems to be a *necessary result of an approximation of different races*, **(p.271)** *peculiar*, however, in degree, at least, *to this portion of the world's history*. It has been estimated that the Hawaiians have been reduced as much as eighty-five per cent during the last hundred years. The natives of Tasmania are almost, if not quite, extinct. The Maories are passing away at the rate of about twenty five per cent every fourteen years, and in Australia, as in America, whole tribes have disappeared before the advance of the white man.[10]

Lee's 'The extinction of races' illustrates that, in some circles, the population depletions seen in settler colonies were quickly being naturalized as the endemic process of human extinction, rather than the outcome of policies many now see as genocidal.[11] His chilling list of colonialism's casualties and his hypothesis that such destruction was an apparently 'necessary' feature of 'different races' coming into contact effectively sought to rationalize human endangerment as an inevitable feature of global human contact, even as he noted its prevalence in the 'present' age.

Perhaps most famously, in 1871 Charles Darwin's *Descent of man* proposed that when 'civilised nations come into contact with barbarians the struggle is short, except where a deadly climate gives its aid to the native race'. Expanding further on the consequences of his evolutionary theory for human history, he noted:

> Extinction follows chiefly from the competition of tribe with tribe, and race with race. Various checks are always in action … which serve to keep down the numbers of each savage tribe,—such as periodical famines, the wandering of the parents and the

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> consequent deaths of infants, prolonged suckling, the stealing of women, wars, accidents, sickness, licentiousness, especially infanticide, and, perhaps, lessened fertility from less nutritious food, and many hardships. If from any cause any one of these checks is lessened, even in a slight degree, the tribe thus favoured will tend to increase; and when one of two adjoining tribes becomes more numerous and powerful than the other, the contest is soon settled by war, slaughter, cannibalism, slavery, and absorption. Even when a weaker tribe is not thus abruptly swept away, if it once begins to decrease, it generally goes on decreasing until it is extinct.[12]

Darwin essentially recast intercultural encounters and conflict as a form of human selection that functioned at a group level (whether of nations, races, or tribes): wherever different peoples came into contact, and thus competed for resources, their respective degrees of social and cultural development were **(p.272)** argued to determine who would shortly outlive their rivals. Thus, in Darwin's view, an inhospitable climate remained the only hope for the ostensibly uncivilized or weaker peoples. Such views gained further purchase as some peoples were argued to have become genuinely extinct. Notoriously, in 1869 William Lanney, widely perceived as the last Tasmanian man, and, in 1876 Trugernanner, reported to be the last Tasmanian woman, passed away.[13]

Prophesied doom did not go unchallenged. Thomas Bendyshe, who translated the *Anthropological treatise of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach* (1865), presented an alternative explanation at the same meeting of the Society at which Lee had spoken. Deeply dismissive of those who claimed human extinction was Providential will, he acknowledged that human populations were declining in numerous colonized lands, including North America; nonetheless, he insisted that predestined extinction had been predicted with 'some unphilosophical haste' since it had yet to be established as a 'fact'. In contrast, he proposed the 'more reasonable view' that 'races have only been, or brought to the verge of extinction' when other peoples occupied their land at the same time as their 'number was in the process of diminution through the operation of the same causes to which all races are periodically subject'.[14] Thus, according to Bendyshe, if favourable conditions were able to re-emerge, through natural change or artificial encouragement, endangered peoples would be able to recover from the demographic depletion.

American writers contributed heavily to the creation and promotion of a naturalized view of human extinction. Theodor Waitz's *Introduction to anthropology* (1863), for instance, observed that craniometrist Samuel Morton, Harvard-based natural historian Louis Agassiz, and their followers had created an 'American School' which promoted the view that since the extinction of the 'lower races is predestined by nature … it would appear that we must not merely acknowledge the right of the white American to destroy the red man, but perhaps praise him that he has constituted himself the instrument of Providence in carrying out and promoting this law of destruction. The pious manslayer thus enjoys the consolation that he acts according to the laws of nature which govern the rise and extinction of races.'[15] Although not convinced by these claims, Waitz's work, originally published in Germany in 1859, indicates how American theorists were becoming internationally associated with rationalizing exterminationist political policies by promoting human **(p.273)** extinction as desirable and an inevitable by-product of intercultural contact (long before Darwin's own work on human evolution). As the notion of human extinction became entrenched within the sciences, anthropologists increasingly sought to catalogue,

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classify, and preserve dying races before they disappeared entirely. Like museum relics, some humans were increasingly likely to be seen as remnants of the human past.[16] Meanwhile, by direct appeal or implication, notions of human endangerment underpinned changing political policies on indigenous peoples' futures.

II

In the American context, it has been argued that in the early nineteenth century the idea of vanishing Indians was nurtured by nationalist writers who incorporated it into an epic tale of America's progressive civilization and progress. In this epic, Native Americans became ancient inhabitants who were doomed to disappear in the face of presumed progress, much as the ancient Britons had in Britain.[17] One of the best-known uses of this kind of narrative is to be found in the work of painter and collector George Catlin. Although well known, Catlin's career is worth considering because he provides an excellent example of how closely entangled were notions of wilderness, endangerment, and conservation in the early to mid-nineteenth century, and provides a contrast with the later period. In the 1830s, Catlin spent six years wandering the plains and Rocky Mountains of North America in an effort to document its inhabitants, whilst also amassing an enormous collection of artefacts from the various First Nations amongst whom he found hospitality. Ultimately, Catlin hoped to make his mark and fortune by selling the entire collection to the American government as a comprehensive record of its vanishing people. When this venture failed, Catlin toured the British, European, and American lecture circuits in the 1840s, accompanied by three groups of Anishinabe and Bakhoje. Catlin's shows publicized the plight of peoples whom he believed were in danger of either being wiped out entirely or, to their profound detriment, losing their cultural identity by becoming assimilated into urban American life.[18]

(p.274) Significantly, Catlin set out on his trek precisely because, like many others, he was utterly persuaded that the Indians and the pristine wilderness in which they lived were endangered.[19] His sense of urgency was aided by the fact that he set off on his trek in the wake of significant shifts in federal Indian policy.[20] In 1830, under the presidency of Andrew Jackson, the United States passed legislation that came to be known as the Indian Removal Act and which, for the first time, legalized the forced removal of peoples east of the Mississippi to the west. Suggested by Jefferson and James Monroe, but enforced by Jackson, the legislation was publicly rationalized by the claim that, if nothing was done, the spectre of certain extinction hovered over the eastern nations. Infamously, in 1829 Jackson's first Annual Message to Congress had claimed that:

> Our ancestors found them [Indians] the uncontrolled possessors of these vast regions. By persuasion and force, they have been made to retire from river to river, and from mountain to mountain; until some of the tribes have become extinct, and others have left but remnants, to preserve, for a while, their once terrible names. Surrounded by the whites, with their arts of civilization, which, by destroying the resources of the savage, doom him to weakness and decay; the fate of the Mohegan, the Narragansett, and the Delaware, is fast overtaking the Choctaw, the Cherokee, and the Creek. That this fate surely awaits them, if they remain within the limits of the States, does not admit of a

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> doubt. Humanity and national honor demand that every effort should be made to avert such a great calamity.[21]

Bitterly fought over, the legislation eventually passed with a majority of just one vote.[22] Jackson's development of and commitment to the policy, especially in the face of such vigorous opposition, suggests how in some circles the prospects for assimilation, the other available option, were deemed either practically unfeasible or impossible. Instead, since westward expansion could not be halted (or willingly and easily contemplated), its effects on indigenous populations could be alleviated, Jackson expediently argued, only by enforced relocation to a designated territory of the government's choosing. Catlin began his travels up the Missouri River in the wake of these policy shifts and in full expectation of the impending disappearance of his subjects.[23] As a **(p.275)** result of these kinds of discussion and romantic idealization, in the early to mid-nineteenth century 'real Indians' come to be thought of as either belonging to the past when their populations were more abundant, or west of the (as yet uncolonized) Mississippi River. Eastern Indians were often argued to have been deeply corrupted by their contact with settlers, practically non-existent, or in desperate need of paternalistic protection from possible extinction.[24] Moreover, Jackson simultaneously argued that the policy would protect the relocated peoples whilst presiding over an Act that made provision for future Indian extinction by stating that the 'United States will forever secure and guaranty to them [removed Indians], and their heirs or successors, the country so exchanged with them … *Provided always*, That such lands shall revert to the United States, if the Indians become extinct, or abandon the same.'[25] In doing so, the Act reinforced the expectation that extinction was not only possible, but should be pre-emptively written into national legislation.

The 1840s and 1850s witnessed significant westward expansion, increasing pressure to acquire Indian lands, and a shift in Indian policy from removal to confinement on reservations.[26] For instance, between 1845 and 1850, the Union expanded as Texas, California, and Oregon either gained statehood or came under US control, and Mexico ceded a vast southwestern territory after the Mexican–American War.[27] 'It was not long, however, before the idea of moving a *few* Indians out of the way became a policy of confining *all* Indians in the out-of-the-way places.'[28] Reservations differed from previous Indian territories by allowing for rather more than the enforced relocation of numerous groups into more colonially convenient locations; instead, they were tied to paternalistic attempts to control and assimilate indigenous peoples. It has been suggested that the reservation system, as set up in California, was modelled on the use of asylums in broader contexts to isolate problematic individuals in special environments in order to correct perceived shortcomings. **(p.276)** Moreover, since the reservation had been 'designed as a movable asylum, both keepers and inmates came to see the reserve as a transient institution'.[29] Paradoxically, supporters argued that such confinement and segregation was essential to eventual assimilation; in effect, reservations were intended to function as an intermediate zone (temporal and spatial) between colonial encroachment and future citizenship.

By 1865, suspected governmental corruption and inefficiency within the Bureau of Indian Affairs, tensions between settlers and Indians following the Civil War, and events such as the Sand Creek massacre of 1864 prompted a congressional investigation into Indian affairs.[30] Senator Doolittle's subsequent report on the *Condition of the Indian tribes* (1867) summarized

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the responses to a questionnaire initially circulated to politicians, army officers, agents, and missionaries. Although predominantly concerned with how to improve the Indian service and the future of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (the report recommended it remain with the Department of the Interior rather than be moved to the War Department), it also collated information on the state of indigenous populations and the best way to tackle any perceived problems. Significantly, twenty of the twenty-seven respondents felt that Indian populations were decreasing, whilst only one observed an increase. The demise was attributed to factors as diverse as 'Providence, the encroachment of the white man, civilization in all its forms, inefficient and unfaithful agents, injustice and abuse, want of proper judicious attention—all these cause the extinction of the Indian race.'[31] The remedial measures proposed ranged from 'there is none' to 'the only practical remedy to prevent the total extinction of the Indian tribes, is to separate them entirely from the white race'.[32] Ultimately, the committee suggested that as traditional 'hunting grounds are taken away, the reservation system, which is the only alternative to their extermination, must be adopted'.[33] The extensive report provides a fascinating insight into mid-century perceptions of decline. Crucially, it also suggests how the notion of human endangerment contributed to discussions on the future of federal Indian policy and the reform of the Indian service. After all, one of the professed roles of the service was to protect the indigenous populations as best they could until they were either entirely assimilated or extirpated.

(p.277) In the 1880s, federal Indian policy shifted again in an interventionist attempt to transform Indian subsistence through the use of allotment. In 1887, Senator Henry Dawes guided the General Allotment Act into the statute books. Coupled with mission schools and industrial training, the period witnessed an aggressive push towards assimilation, which continued until 1934 when Franklin Roosevelt's Indian New Deal abolished allotment and attempted to restore Indian self-government.[34] Essentially, the Act legalized the partition of reservations into small holdings that were owned by individual Indians, rather than held in common by a tribe, and also conferred citizenship upon holders of allotted land. Significantly, by stipulating how much land individuals needed, the Dawes Act effectively endorsed the federal redistribution of 'surplus' land for purchase by settlers and commercial development, particularly by railway companies. Intended to create a nation dependent on farming, its supporters hoped that it would free up valuable, and currently 'wasted', lands. Spurred on by the conviction that hunting and gathering was fundamentally inefficient when compared to an agrarian subsistence, supporters of allotment consistently argued that Indians must be 'civilized' for the good of both the nation and themselves.[35] In this sense, reformers followed in the vein of Jefferson, who had dreamed of transforming Indians into yeoman farmers.[36] Meanwhile, as noted by its original Indian 'beneficiaries' and subsequent historians, the Act implicitly depended upon the notion of human extinction, since it made no provision for a future increase in Indian populations.[37] Meanwhile, just as the notion of human endangerment underpinned shifts in federal Indian policy throughout the nineteenth century, by the late 1800s it had simultaneously become associated with new conservationist agendas in the formation of the national parks.

III

In 1832, as part of Catlin's campaign to promote the protection of Indians, he envisioned a future in which 'by some great protecting policy of government', the nation's realms would be

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> preserved in their pristine beauty and wilderness, in a *magnificent park*, where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping with his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the **(p.278)** fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes. What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages! A *nation's Park*, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty.[38]

Catlin's well-known dream has often led to him being credited with inventing the notion of a national park. Whether one chooses to accept this genealogy or not, it is particularly pertinent that his vision emerged out of a sense that parks might prevent Indian extermination. Moreover, he not only included Indians within park boundaries, but expected them to continue using the land in their customary ways. Yet, as the century wore on, the land's ancestral inhabitants were increasingly likely to be literally and figuratively excised from their homelands. Catlin's American landscapes usually included Indians as a means of indicating his subjects' pristine and untouched nature. Likewise, Thomas Cole, founder of the Hudson River School of American landscape painting, often used such figures to indicate 'wildness' in a way that was consistent with romantic notions of a once noble, but now doomed, race. In contrast, by the mid-century wilderness has been redefined as natural landscape that was both untouched and uninhabited by humans. Thus, images such as Thomas Moran's *Mountain of the Holy Cross* (1875) or Charles M. Russell's painting *When the land belonged to God* (1914) relied upon using nature's sublime quality to help establish wilderness as the pristine creation of Providence and protected from human interference.[39] Ultimately, this notion of wilderness underpinned a new way of furthering forced relocation and progressive territorial dispossession.

National parks, the crown jewels of American environmental heritage, both created and perpetuated a vision of wilderness in which the nation's landscapes were devoid of continued human presence. Whilst California's Yosemite was established as the first state park in 1864, Yellowstone became the world's first national park in 1872.[40] Over the century, a variety of arguments were proposed in favour of creating this new heritage solution. In the earliest campaigns, they were often justified as a means of creating national monuments. Whilst campaigners regularly argued that the parks were areas of unmatched natural splendour, they consistently reiterated their agricultural or commercial worthlessness. Meanwhile, powerful corporations such as the railway companies lent their support to the movement in an effort to secure the custom of future tourists.[41] As has been acknowledged, these campaigns **(p.279)** ironically began promoting the virtues of communal ownership in an era when the Dawes Act sought to remedy the 'problem' of tribal ownership because it was seen as uncivilized and as perpetuating 'heathen' forms of 'socialism' or 'communism'.[42] In later years, as the concern regarding the extinction of flora and fauna gained ground, the arguments shifted to favour conservationist agendas, with campaigners arguing that the parks offered a sanctuary for endangered species.[43]

In recent years, there has been considerable interest in traditional uses of national parkland. Such work has drawn attention to the ways in which Indian uses of their homelands were consistently misunderstood and suppressed in order to create the national parks.[44] In most cases, the parks were cobbled together from First Nations' lands, which sometimes became entirely enclosed within the newly established reservations, and their ownership transferred to

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the United States of America. For example, Yellowstone (f. 1872) had been used regularly by Sheepeater, Crow, Shoshone, Nez Perce Bannock, Flathead, Blackfeet, and Tukedeka groups; Yosemite (made national in 1890) was home to Miwok groups; Mesa Verde (f. 1906) was associated with the Utes and Anasazi; Glacier National Park (f. 1910) was home to the Blackfeet; whilst the Grand Canyon (f. 1919) was used by the Hopi and Navajo. In creating parks, the government often insisted on transferring land into national ownership and extinguishing subsistence rights to activities such as hunting or timber use. Moreover, the establishment of the parks frequently involved coercive land transfer and owed much to successful lobbying from corporations.[45] Simultaneously, in the earliest park campaigns, park officials argued that they needed to rid the park of Indian inhabitants in case they scared visitors and therefore spoiled their enjoyment of the parks.[46] Later in the century, traditional uses of the land came to be seen as environmentally ignorant and so provided new grounds for rationalizing indigenous exclusion in favour of federal management. For instance, officials began arguing that Indians must be removed because their ostensibly ignorant behaviour, such as hunting and lighting fires, was damaging the pristine nature of the American wilderness and possibly causing the extinction of flora and fauna. In this context, Indians became seen as the destroyers of wilderness. Thus, it has been argued that the removal undertaken at the park's set-up has to be seen within the context of the 'American Wonderland' and fears that Indians might stop tourists from enjoying the park's pleasures, rather than an immediate concern with environmental protection.

(p.280) National parks were routinely promoted as untouched wildernesses; however, maintaining this 'wilderness' usually involved considerable effort: customary uses of the land were denied or suppressed and traditional uses of parkland had to be policed. For instance, Nathaniel Langford's *Diary of the Washburn expedition to Yellowstone and Firehole rivers* (1905) alleged that the notion of establishing Yellowstone as a national park had occurred to a group of Montana men with whom he was trekking and camping in the areas basins in the summer of 1870. One evening, around the campfire, they discussed the best means of publicizing their adventures. Some proposed that they should lay claim to the land, divide it between them, and then profit from the tourists who would inevitably follow when the public learned of the wonders they had seen. One man, Cornelius Hedges, vehemently disagreed, saying that the whole area ought to be set aside as a national park. Quickly converted, they agreed to try and establish the park as soon as possible.[47] In their later campaigns to establish the park, the group would later claim that the land was no longer used by Indians (falsely claiming that they were scared of the geysers) and so was available for the nation; however, as recent histories of the American conservation movement show, despite their claims, these campaigners were well aware of the Indian presence. For instance, they not only requested a military escort to offer them protection from the Indian populations but they met bands of Crow passing through the area. They also saw several abandoned camps on their travels through the landscape. Instead of recognizing them as seasonal dwellings that were temporarily out of use, the group dismissed them as marks made by ancient inhabitants rather than contemporary populations or, in the case of the Crow whom they saw whilst trekking, plains Indians anomalously seeking refuge in mountains.[48]

The measures taken to suppress Indian use overlooked the fact that much of the environments the parks sought to preserve had been created by human intervention. For example, in Yellowstone, hunting had led to the extinction of ancient varieties of animal such as the horse,

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bison, and camel in this region. With their disappearance, subsistence patterns changed to incorporate the area's plants and smaller animals and continued into the late nineteenth century. Indians used the thermal properties of the park's geysers to prepare food, aid healing, and as sites for religious worship. Meanwhile, the area contained ancient campsites, formed part of a trade network in obsidian, and was marked with a trail system, which is still followed by modern park highways. Crucially, fires were regularly lit to manage the undergrowth and **(p. 281)** help promote the flora and fauna on which Indians subsisted.[49] By promoting a vision of wilderness in which human usage was either systematically erased or denied, the national parks contributed to a broader current that has continued to hold sway in some conservationist circles. Yet, as environmental historians have consistently argued, this presents considerable problems for both historians and policy-makers. By effectively denying human intervention, use, and management of nature as legitimate or desirable, this narrow vision of wilderness creates a bipolar bind in which the 'natural' and 'artificial' vie against each other.[50]

Although the use of national parkland remains heavily contested to the present by many First Nations, ultimately, the park officials managed to win a victory of sorts. In Yosemite, Miwok villages were strategically razed to the ground whilst the peoples were starved or froze.[51] In Yellowstone, treaty-making progressively ceded ever larger portions of Indian territory to the nation. In 1886 park grounds received military protection, and in 1894 hunting was criminalized in park grounds.[52] These kinds of protectionist activity systematically redefined customary uses of the land as 'poaching' or criminal damage. The measures taken in Yellowstone were successful enough for George Wingate to gloat, 'The Indian difficulty has been cured, the Indians have been forced back on their distant reservations, and the traveller in the park will see or hear no more of them than if he was in the Adirondacks or White Mountains.'[53] Thus, as parks were established and lands ceded, reservations, the parks' human corollaries, became home to ever more people. However, despite Wingate's assertions, considerable tensions were caused as Indians continued to cross parklands and make use of the land away from the tourist trails. Such persistent resistance left many early conservationists clamouring for a more effective means of ensuring that Indians remained on their allotted reservations and off parkland.[54] In this sense, reservations gained a new role in both perpetuating Indian dispossession and the protecting of the environment. Crucially, Yellowstone set precedents that were followed when further national parks were created, such as the National Glacier Park and at Yosemite.[55]

Whilst for Catlin a national park would provide a means of protecting vanishing Indians, by the time the parks were established they became associated with a new vision of wilderness that implicitly came to promote the **(p.282)** notion of Indians as belonging to the past. For early tourists the Indian presence was usually either absent, minimal, or heavily stage-managed. For example, many Indians began to retreat from the tourist trails, coerced by the official move to curtail their activities.[56] Meanwhile, Indians such as the Blackfeet at Glacier National Park sometimes worked as tour guides or performed set pieces designed to showcase their lifestyles to the paying public. In this sense, they provided entertainment as exemplars of America's earliest peoples, or '"past-tense" Indians', rather than the present-day dispossessed.[57] Moreover, in 1906 Congress introduced legislation known as the Antiquities Act, which allowed the removal of land from public sale if it was deemed of sufficient historical significance. Partly

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introduced to preserve Indian relics, the Act nonetheless celebrated '*ancient* Indian peoples, not contemporary' groups.[58] Such attention to preserving Indian antiquities, especially in park grounds, further contributed to the sense that the land was no longer inhabited by humans; yet, it simultaneously undermined the very notion of wilderness that park officials were attempting to stage-manage in conservationist circles. Thus, as historians of the parks have argued, 'With newcomers believing that the land was virgin or that native populations would soon disappear, early park experiences seemed to confirm this bias.'[59] Meanwhile, America's parks provided a global model for the emergence of protected natural landscapes for both the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

IV

America was home to the world's first national parks, but its earliest conservation ventures, such as Yellowstone, set precedents that were quickly repeated worldwide. Other former British possessions quickly took up the 'American experiment' including Canada (1887), Australia (1879, 1891, and 1915), and New Zealand (1894). In particular, the use of military personnel in park management, the growing importance attached to environmental conservation (often equating to an advocacy of wilderness), and the development of both a national and international tourist trade became common features. In Britain, the campaigning for national parks began early in the twentieth century but failed to see fruition until after the Second World War. Meanwhile, significant conservationist efforts were expended in Africa with the establishment of Kenya's Kruger Park in 1926, and Tanzania's Serengeti Park in 1948. In the **(p.283)** mid-twentieth century, American interest turned towards addressing the issue of conservation globally, rather than nationally, as the campaign to establish the first international inventory of extinction flourished.[60]

Of these sites, Kenya, formerly British East Africa Protectorate, provides one of the most instructive counterparts in terms of territorial dispossession, environmental conservation, and modern political significance through the case of the Maasai.[61] In 1904, in order to clear the way for white settlement, the British relocated the nomadic Maasai from their favoured grazing grounds to two reserves, on the promise that they would retain their right to these areas 'so long as the Masai as a race shall exist'.[62] Yet, between 1911 and 1913, over 20,000 northern Maasai were moved at gunpoint to a new southern reserve, which they considered to be of inferior quality, resulting in a loss of land estimated at between 50 and 70 per cent. In 1913, a group of Maasai launched an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to legally challenge the territorial dispossession.

The relocation of the Maasai presents several *thematic* parallels to the American formation of the national parks. For instance, Lord Cranworth's *A colony in the making* (1912) presents a history of British East Africa in which white settlers arrived to find 'large tracts of splendid grazing land, apparently not occupied at all, certainly not utilised' that they aspired to cultivate. Such aspirations left the Maasai in 'danger of degeneration if not of extermination' unless a 'reserve large enough to allow them to carry on their own mode of wandering life' was created or they 'abandon[ed] their habits and gradually' became 'useful members of society by curtailing their area and interspersing it with European farms and settlements'.[63] In this sense, the notion of endangerment played an important role in rationalizing the choice to relocate and, as the original treaty suggests, the possible future extinction of the Maasai was anticipated. Moreover,

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the relocation was not originally undertaken for the purposes of environmental conservation, but to open up land for settlement; only later did it become associated with conservationist agendas and the protection of flora and fauna. Likewise, modern political activists have consistently sought to reassert their ownership and seek restitution in debates that play an important role in determining ethnic identity. Whilst these claims **(p.284)** clearly have a strong historical basis, activists erase the use of the land by other groups such as the Kikuyu, and inaccurately argue that the Maasai actively fought to save their land in 1904, as they seek to reconcile their desire to return with the historical act of departure.[64] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to argue for a direct genealogical relationship between the American and African examples discussed here and it is crucial that comparative studies remain alert to regional specificities.[65] Nonetheless, the similarities are instructive as they indicate the rich potential for both a global history of human endangerment and new opportunities for historians of heritage.

V

It has been beyond the scope of this chapter to provide anything but the briefest sketch of how science was mobilized in debates over human endangerment and conservationism; however, examining the notion of endangered peoples, particularly within the formative American context, raises issues that are of considerable relevance for broader histories of heritage.

Exploring human endangerment presents valuable opportunities to make histories of the environment and heritage more balanced, by reintegrating humans within these histories as both the subjects and agents of conservation policy. Many studies of heritage and environmental conservation not only focus on campaigns in favour of conservation, but tend to focus on large mammals, such as the tiger or the World Wildlife Fund’s iconic panda; buildings; and special, often aesthetically spectacular, sites such as the Taj Mahal, Stonehenge, or Yellowstone. By contrast, human endangerment is often discussed in separate literatures, for example within the context of land rights, the emergence of the reservation system, or genocide.[66] Yet, these separate histories often take for granted a potentially anachronistic distinction between humans and their natural environment. Throughout the nineteenth century, but especially in the early 1800s, natural history was a broadly defined field in **(p.285)** which humans, animals, and plants were equally legitimate objects of study. As such, the study of human varieties was intimately bound to the broader environment. Recognizing and exploring these historical associations does not require historians to promote the rather offensive assumption that indigenous peoples are, in any sense, just another element of natural environments. Rather, it pushes them to acknowledge and take account of how the shifting relationships between humans and the environment had significant repercussions for the later debates on how land ought to be used and by whom, most obviously with the establishment of the national parks.

A consideration of the debates on human endangerment and the preservation of wilderness also highlights how, despite appearances, the whole notion of wilderness is fundamentally problematic, in that it often denies, or seeks to erase, human presence or historical usage. The birth of the park system helped to both create and promote a vision of wilderness that continues to remain powerful and which has complicated associations with the notion of dying races. Most obviously, and in many senses, this has potential parallels in the debates over restoration and what counts as authentic or the most appropriate object of conservationist agendas. Meanwhile, it also raises the politically critical and unresolved issue of land rights for dislocated, often

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formerly colonized, peoples, created by the emergence of protected areas; for instance, one recent survey offered the provisional, and likely underestimate, of 'just under 250 reports on relocations from 180 protected areas', which provided 'substantial evidence of the harm done by eviction' in terms of both economic, social, and territorial terms.[67] Indigenous resistance to such dispossession has long been manifest in intense inter-ethnic conflict within settler societies; after all, would-be colonists had to fight, with guns and treaties, to forcibly relocate many peoples. Yet, in their contemporary guises, such campaigns for the recognition and protection of indigenous rights stem from, and are relevant to, broader developments in the aftermath of the Second World War, such as the move to reject racism and recognize universal human rights, and the struggle to secure self-rule during decolonization.[68] More recently, during the 1860s and 1870s, the establishment of politically active non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Survival International (f. 1969), which focused exclusively on indigenous rights and the mobilization of aboriginal political organizations, have further highlighted the attempts of formerly marginalized communities to obtain some form of redress. Thus, the notion of wilderness, **(p.286)** and thereby its conservation, is fundamentally rooted in coerced and collaborative dispossession and in the trope of human endangerment, creating a complicated and rich history that is worth revisiting. Ultimately, regarding humans as both agents and subjects in discussions on environmental change offers the possibility of integrating currently separate literatures, offering a balanced perspective on the notion of heritage and opportunities to craft histories that treat human dispossession as more than a contextualizing 'touch of history'.[69]

Notes:

([1]) Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the state of Virginia* (3rd edn., New York, 1801), pp. 139–40 and Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians: the tragic fate of the first Americans* (Cambridge, MA, 1999). In Britain, 'Native American' has long been the preferred term; however, in some American contexts, the term 'Indian' has been reappropriated, as in the National Museum of the American Indian, and so is used in this chapter.

([2]) Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*, pp. 89–90.

([3]) On settler colonialism see James Belich, *Replenishing the earth: the settler revolution and the rise of the Anglo-world, 1783–1939* (Oxford, 2009).

([4]) Martin Rudwick, *Bursting the limits of time: the reconstruction of geohistory in the age of revolution* (Chicago, 2005), p. 244.

([5]) Rudwick, *Bursting the limits of time*, p. 243.

([6]) Mark V. Barrow, Jr, *Nature's ghosts: confronting extinction from the age of Jefferson to the age of ecology* (Chicago, 2009), pp. 39–42.

([7]) Barrow, *Nature's ghosts*, p. 370, n. 103.

([8]) Ronal Meek, *Social science and the ignoble savage* (Cambridge, 1976) and Roxann Wheeler, *The complexion of race: categories of difference in eighteenth-century culture* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000).

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([9]) Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian policy in the Jacksonian era* (Lincoln, NE, 1975).

([10]) Richard Lee, 'The extinction of races', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, 2 (1864), pp. xcv–xcix, my emphasis.

([11]) See the treatment of such colonial activity in Ben Kiernan, *Blood and soil: a world history of genocide and extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (Princeton, NJ, 2007) and A. Dirk Moses, ed., *Empire, colony, genocide: conquest, occupation, and subaltern resistance in world history* (Oxford, 2008).

([12]) Charles Darwin, *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex* (London, 1871), p. 238.

([13]) Patrick Bratlinger, *Dark vanishings: discourse on the extinction of primitive races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2003) and Lyndall Ryan, *The aboriginal Tasmanians* (St Lucia, 1981).

([14]) T[homas] Bendyshe, 'On the extinction of races', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, 2 (1864), pp. xcix–cxii, at xcix and ci–cii. See also Brian Dippie, *The vanishing American: white attitudes and U.S. Indian policy* (Lawrence, KA, 1982), pp. 122–38.

([15]) Theodor Waitz, *Introduction to anthropology*, ed. J. Frederick Collingwood (London, 1863), p. 351.

([16]) Jacob Gruber, 'Ethnographic salvage and the shaping of anthropology', *American Anthropologist*, 72 (1970), pp. 1289–99.

([17]) A. von Riper, *Men among the mammoths: Victorian science and the discovery of human prehistory* (Chicago, 1993).

([18]) Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776–1930* (Princeton, NJ, 2009) and Sadiah Qureshi, *Peoples on parade: exhibitions, empire and anthropology in nineteenth-century Britain* (Chicago, 2011).

([19]) John Hausdoerfer, *Catlin's lament: Indians, manifest destiny and the ethics of nature* (Lawrence, KA, 2009).

([20]) S. Lyman Tyler, *A history of Indian policy* (Washington, DC, 1973); Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: the United States government and the American Indians* (2 vols. combined, Lincoln, NE, 1995).

([21]) Andrew Jackson, 'First annual message, Dec. 8 1829', in N. H. Concord, ed., *Messages of Gen. Andrew Jackson with a short sketch of his life* (Boston, MA, 1837), pp. 39–68, at p. 61.

([22]) Satz, *American Indian policy*. See also R. Douglas Hurt, *The Indian Frontier, 1763–1846* (Albuquerque, NM, 2002).

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([23]) Hausdoerfer, *Catlin's lament*; Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness: Indian removal and the making of the national parks* (Oxford, 1999); Kathryn S. Hight, '"Doomed to perish": George Catlin's depictions of the Mandan', *Art Journal*, 49 (1990), pp. 119–24.

([24]) Dippie, *The Vanishing American*.

([25]) Indian Removal Act, 28 May 1830, repr. in Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian policy* (Lincoln, NE, 1975), pp. 52–3.

([26]) On the development of reservations see Joel R. Hyer, *'We are not savages': Native Americans in southern California and the Pala Reservation, 1840–1920* (East Lansing, MI, 2001); George Harwood Phillips, *Indians and Indian agents: the origins of the reservation system in California, 1849–1852* (Norman, OK, 1997); Jane F. Lancaster, *Removal aftershock: the Seminoles' struggles to survive in the West, 1836–1866* (Knoxville, TN, 1994); Brad Asher, *Beyond the reservation: Indians, settlers, and the law in Washington Territory, 1853–1889* (Norman, OK, 1999); Richard J. Perry, *Apache reservation: indigenous peoples and the American state* (Austin, TX, 1993); and David J. Wishart, *Unspeakable sadness: the dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln, NE, 1994).

([27]) See Robert M. Utley, *The Indian frontier, 1846–1890* (Albuquerque, NM, 1984) and Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the land: Indians and empires in the early American West* (Boston, MA, 2006) for broader shifts in this period.

([28]) Phillips, *Indians and Indian agents*, p. 4.

([29]) John M. Findlay, 'An elusive institution: the birth of Indian reservations in gold rush California', in George Pierre Castile and Robert L. Bee, eds., *State and reservation: new perspectives on federal Indian policy* (Tucson, AZ, 1992), pp. 19–21, at p. 19.

([30]) Donald Chaput, 'Generals, Indian agents, politicians: the Doolittle survey of 1865', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 3 (1972), pp. 269–82. See also Blackhawk, *Violence over the land*.

([31]) US Congress, Senate, *Condition of the Indian tribes: report of the joint special committee appointed under joint resolution of March 3, 1965* (Washington, DC, 1867), p. 428. Better known as the Doolittle report.

([32]) Ibid., pp. 472 and 440 respectively.

([33]) Ibid., p. 7.

([34]) Tyler, *A history of Indian policy*.

([35]) Philip Burnham, *Indian country, God's country: Native Americans and national parks* (Washington, DC, 2002), pp. 35–9.

([36]) Wallace, *Jefferson and the Indians*.

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([37]) Dippie, *The vanishing American*; Burnham, *Indian country, God's country*.

([38]) George Catlin, *Letters and notes on the manners, customs and condition of the North American Indians* (2 vols., London, 1841), i, p. 262.

([39]) This discussion draws heavily from Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness*.

([40]) Burnham, *Indian country, God's country*, p. 20.

([41]) Ibid., p. 19.

([42]) Ibid., p. 37.

([43]) Barrow, *Nature's Ghosts*; Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness*.

([44]) Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness*; Burnham, *Indian country, God's country*, and Michael F. Turek, *American Indians and national parks* (Tuscon, AZ, 1998).

([45]) Burnham, *Indian country, God's country*, p. 9 and pp. 16–19.

([46]) Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness*, pp. 54–6.

([47]) Keller and Turek, *American Indians and national parks*, p. 23; Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness*.

([48]) Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness*, pp. 41–54; Keller and Turek, *American Indians and national parks*, pp. 24–6.

([49]) Keller and Turek, *American Indians and national parks*, p. 22.

([50]) William Cronon, 'The trouble with wilderness; or, getting back to the wrong nature', in idem, ed., *Uncommon ground: rethinking the human place in nature* (New York, 1995), pp. 69–90. Reprinted in *Environmental History*, 1 (1996), pp. 7–28.

([51]) Keller and Turek, *American Indians and national parks*, p. 21.

([52]) Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness*, pp. 55–70.

([53]) George W. Wingate, *Through the Yellowstone park on horseback* (New York, 1886), p. 140.

([54]) Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness*, pp. 62–70.

([55]) Ibid.

([56]) Burnham, *Indian country, God's country*.

([57]) Spence, *Dispossessing the wilderness*, pp. 71–82, at p. 71, and Keller and Turek, *American Indians and national parks*, pp. 56–64.

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([58]) Burnham, *Indian country, God's country*, pp. 48–59, at p. 49.

([59]) Keller and Turek, *American Indians and national parks*, p. 20.

([60]) William M. Adams, *Against extinction: the story of conservation* (London, 2004), pp. 67–100, at p. 78. On the international conservation movement in relationship to animals see Barrow, *Nature's ghosts*, especially pp. 135–67.

([61]) See the excellent Lotte Hughes, 'Rough time in paradise: claims, blames and memory making around some protected areas in Kenya', *Conservation and Society*, 5 (2007), pp. 307–30, and idem, 'Malice in Maasailand: the historical roots of current political struggles', *African Affairs*, 104 (2005), pp. 202–24.

([62]) Cited in Hughes, 'Rough time in paradise', p. 310.

([63]) Lord Cranworth, *A colony in the making: or sport and profit in British East Africa* (London, 1912), pp. 35–6.

([64]) Hughes, 'Rough time in paradise' and idem, 'Malice in Maasailand'.

([65]) For instance, in Canada's Banff National Park, aboriginal peoples' exclusion was rationalized primarily in order to preserve game (rather than wildlife more broadly), stimulate hunting tourism, and promote assimilation rather than to promote the notion of wilderness. Significantly, in the Canadian context, this exclusion occurred in a period when human inhabitation was both common and not subject to the same forms of exclusion seen in the American context. Theodore Binnema and Melanie Niemi, '"Let the line be drawn now": wilderness, conservation, and the exclusion of aboriginal people from Banff National Park', *Environmental History*, 11 (2006), pp. 724–50.

([66]) In addition to the material already cited see David Maybury-Lewis, 'Genocide against indigenous peoples', in Alexander Laban Hinton, ed., *Annihilating difference: the anthropology of genocide* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), pp. 41–53 and Kiernan, *Blood and soil*.

([67]) Daniel Brockington and James Igoe, 'Eviction for conservation: a global overview', *Conservation and Society*, 4 (2006), pp. 424–70, at pp. 427–8. It should be added that the numbers of people evicted in these reports are often omitted; however, where included they ranged from 'five families … to tens of thousands of people', p. 437.

([68]) Ken S. Coates, *A global history of indigenous peoples: struggle and survival* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 232–63.

([69]) Mahesh Rangarajan and Ghazala Shahabuddin, 'Displacement and reolcation from protected areas: towards a biological and historical synthesis', *Conservation and Society*, 4 (2006), pp. 359–78.

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