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The Yosemite Riot : changes in policy and management in the National Park Service

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THE YOSEMITE RIOT:
CHANGES IN POLICY AND MANAGEMENT
IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Laura Avedisian
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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Billie Jensen", written in black ink on a white background.

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ABSTRACT

On July 4th, 1970, a violent clash between the rangers of Yosemite National Park and hundreds of youth gathered at Stoneman Meadow in Yosemite Valley gained nation-wide attention. The Stoneman Meadow Riot resulted in over one hundred arrests, several injuries, and much destruction of property. Public outcry and government investigations after the incident had a significant influence on future policies, management decisions and training practices of the National Park Service. The incident also drew attention to the often paradoxical mandate of the Park Service both to preserve natural resources and to provide for public enjoyment, sparking debate on significant questions: What is the purpose of National Parks? Whose are they? How should they be managed? This paper explores the riot itself, its background, and the changes which resulted.

To my friends who gave me the idea: Mike, Dennis and Adam. To those who gave me support: Debby, Jennifer J., Jennifer L., Kathleen, Teddy, Jeff, Mark and especially Mom. To Diana, for editing, suggesting and listening.

To Linda Eade, Research Librarian, and Jim Snyder, Historian, for invaluable help. To Bill, Kerry, Dean, Bob R., Bob F., and everyone else who spoke to me about the riot. And to Dr. Jensen for her patience and good humor.

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CHAPTER I

THE PURPOSE AND MANAGEMENT OF NATIONAL PARKS

The Creation of the National Park System

There is a story, almost a myth, surrounding the creation of the first national park. This folklore says that one night in 1870 several men of the government-commissioned Washburn-Doane expedition were sitting around a campfire by the Madison River in what is now Yellowstone National Park. During the night, they talked about the success of their expedition to investigate wild tales spread by trappers about the incredible wonders of the region. Awed by what they found, and tempted to parcel the land among themselves for personal use, they ultimately decided that the local features were so unique and inspirational that the area should be designated a park for the enjoyment of all people. In the course of this discussion they laid the foundation for the national park system. Supposedly, their idea spread from that campfire conversation to Congress which set aside Yellowstone in 1872.¹

It would have been amazing if such a unique and revolutionary idea of land management had been invented and readily accepted in such a short time. In reality, ideas such as this one develop slowly. By 1872, the public and Congress were ready to accept the idea of setting certain portions of land aside for

¹ See Hans Huth, *Yosemite, The Story of an Idea* (n.p.: Sierra Club Bulletin, 1948; reprint, Yosemite National Park: Yosemite Association, 1984), 3; William R. Lowry, *The Capacity for Wonder* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1994), 3-4; and Douglas Hubbard, "The Origin of the National Park Idea in America," 1966, Yosemite Research Library.

public benefit. They were prepared to accept this action because many economic and ideological factors had already created a cultural current which made the Yellowstone Act possible.

In the nineteenth century, American attitudes toward nature and the landscapes of the American West were shifting. Colonial images of using fire and the ax against the wilderness and driving the Indian away were still predominant, but an undercurrent was slowly growing. The Puritan image of wilderness expressed by Cotton Mather when he asked, "Where was it, that the Devil fell upon our Lord? it was when he was Alone in the Wilderness,"² gave way to images of a different relationship with the wild. One of the most widely read representations of this shift in philosophy regarding wild lands is found in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*. His hero Natty Bumppo expresses his feelings:

When I felt lonesome. . . I would go into the Catskills and spend a few days on that hill. . . ."What see you when you get there?" asked Edwards. . . . "Creation, lad, all creation," said Natty. "How should a man who has lived in towns. . . know anything about the wonders of the woods? . . . None know how often the hand of God is seen in the wilderness, but them that rove it for a man's life."³

The view that the wilderness was not the Devil's domain, but rather a place to perceive God's handiwork and escape the pressures of civilization was echoed in many works following *The Pioneers*. This attitude was especially common in the published journals, poems and articles of explorers and travelers in the American West.

² Cotton Mather, *Cotton Mather on Witchcraft* (Mt. Vernon, NY: Peter Piper Press, n.d.), 158.

³ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Pioneers* (New York: Dutton, 1970), 74.

Some writers even began to alter this conception of wilderness until it became more than just an appreciation of, and a connection with, the wild. Their writing advocated a new concept. In 1832, George Catlin, a painter and explorer, penned the first known reference to the concept of national parks. Catlin had traveled tirelessly from the Missouri River to Niagara Falls to South Dakota searching for subjects to paint. In his writings, he worried about what would become of the subjects of his paintings, from the Indians to the vast forests and waterfalls. In a letter sent from the Indian Territory which was first published in the *New York Daily Commercial Advertiser*, Catlin wrote of his hope that these lands:

might in future be seen (by some great protecting policy of government) preserved in their pristine beauty and wildness, in a magnificent park, where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse. . . amid the fleeing 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.⁴

Henry Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson echoed the same sentiment, each briefly suggesting in their writings a concept of national preserves, or parks.⁵ However, the utopian sentiments of Catlin, Thoreau or Emerson could not change public opinion or Congressional action without the influence of other factors.

One of those other factors may have been an American feeling of cultural inadequacy. In Alfred Runte's article outlining the history of the national

⁴ George Catlin, quoted in Huth, *Yosemite: The Story of an Idea*, 8. See also Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* 2nd. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 26.

⁵ Huth, *Yosemite: The Story of an Idea*, 8.

park idea he claims that American leaders, writers and thinkers felt a sense of cultural shortcoming due to the lack of castles, cathedrals, and ancient ruins in the American landscape. Because of their world-view, Indian ruins did not enter their thinking in this capacity. This lack of ancient ruins demonstrated a lack of continuity with past civilizations. Therefore, American anxiety over a perceived cultural deficiency may have been one of the factors which led to the creation of the first national park system in the world. Embracing natural wonders as a source of national pride in place of structural remnants of human achievements was a logical reaction.⁶

Runte makes a strong argument for his point with many examples from the Congressional discussions concerning Yellowstone, Sequoia and Yosemite, and by using the writings of nineteenth century conservationists. He quotes extensively from published travel journals like that of Lieutenant Colonel A. V. Kautz, which contain favorable comparisons of American scenery to the famous sights of Europe. In 1857, Kautz described the Cascade Range as "mountain scenery in quantity and quality sufficient to make half a dozen Switzerlands."⁷ Similar sentiments were expressed about the Giant Sequoias by men such as Clarence King, a surveyor and explorer, who said, "No fragment of human work, broken pillar or sand worn image half lifted over pathetic desert - none of these link the past and to-day with anything like the power of these monuments of living antiquity."⁸ Horace Greeley assured the readers of

⁶ Alfred Runte, "The National Park Idea: Origins and Paradox of the American Experience," *Journal of Forest History* 21 (April 1977): 64-75.

⁷ Lieutenant Colonel A.V. Kautz, quoted in Runte, "The National Park Idea," 68.

⁸ Clarence King, quoted in Runte, "The National Park Idea," 70.

his *New York Tribune* that the trees "were of very substantial size when David danced before the ark, when Solomon laid the foundations of the Temple, when Theseus ruled in Athens, when Aeneas fled from the burning wreck of vanquished Troy."⁹ By implication the Americans had claims to antiquity with scenery comparable to or surpassing that of the Old World. By preserving such areas and such claims, the New World had a chance to produce evidence of historical continuity through the landscape.

In 1864, the writings of conservationists and other influences compelled Congressional action as Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias were set aside for the American public. When President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant, years before Yellowstone was turned into a national park, the preservation idea was already gaining momentum. With the Yosemite Grant, Congress and the President had agreed that particular lands should be given directly to the state of California to "be held for public use, resort, and recreation. . . inalienable for all time."¹⁰ The reasons and methods for setting aside Yosemite, Yellowstone, or Hot Springs in Arkansas, were varied. The motivations for preserving particular landscapes included a conservationist view of wilderness and a cultural pride in the landscapes of the American West. However, such acts were often motivated by strong economic causes as well.

⁹ Horace Greeley, quoted in Runte, "The National Park Idea," 71.

¹⁰ U.S. Congress, *An Act Authorizing a grant to the State of California of the "Yosemite Valley," and of the land embracing the "Mariposa Big Tree Grove,"* U.S. Code, title 16, sec. 48 (1864), quoted in Hillory A. Tolson, compiler, *Laws Relating to the National Park Service and the National Parks and Monuments* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964).

Economic interests played a key role in the creation of the Yosemite Grant and Yellowstone National Park. Economics influenced attitudes in two important ways. First, those who stood to gain from the creation of parks, most notably the railroads, lobbied to have the land set aside. Second, in order for a park to be designated by Congress, there had to be strong evidence that the land was commercially useless to traditional entrepreneurs.

After the men of the Washburn-Doane expedition made their ideas public the preservation of the Yellowstone region became a point of debate. Many parties took an interest in the discussion. The Northern Pacific Railroad sponsored artists and lecturers who provided publicity for the cause of the park. One of the agents of the railroad, A. B. Nettleton, wrote in a letter, "Let Congress pass a bill reserving the Great Geyser Basin as a public park forever, just as it has reserved that far inferior wonder the Yosemite Valley and big trees."¹¹ The motivation for this position was that the railroad would be the only method of transport available for most tourists going to the park. The profit potential was so obvious and so enormous that some scholars even suggest that the Northern Pacific Railroad proposed the park bill in the first place.¹² However it was originally sponsored, the Yellowstone Act was signed on March 1, 1872. About two million acres of Wyoming and Montana were to be a "public park or pleasure-ground for the people," and the wonders of the park kept "in their natural condition."¹³

¹¹ A.B. Nettleton, quoted in Joseph L. Sax, *Mountains Without Handrails* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), 6.

¹² Runte, *National Parks*, 44.

¹³ U.S. Congress, *Yellowstone Act, 1872*, quoted in Conrad Wirth, *Parks, Politics and the People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 42.

Congressional concern over designating certain areas as national parks centered on the fear that profitable land might be kept from private ownership. The idea that only commercially worthless land could be set aside was echoed again and again in the Congressional debates. When the Yosemite Grant was proposed by Senator John Conness of California, he assured the Senate that this area of the Sierra Nevada mountains was "for all public purposes worthless, but [it contains], perhaps, some of the greatest wonders of the world."¹⁴ Later he reemphasized this point, saying, "The property is of no value to the Government."¹⁵ Based on this urging, Congress ceded the land to the State of California to be managed by a commission and preserved forever.

Senator Conness had presented the bill to Congress and the President at the urging of influential men in California, including John F. Morse, Israel Ward Raymond, Galen Clark and Frederick Law Olmstead. We may never know the original motivations of all of these men, but some of their most influential opinions were recorded.

Frederick Law Olmstead had already gained prestige as the nation's leading landscape architect with his work on Central Park in New York. While in California for several years, he was one of the first appointed commissioners to help manage Yosemite. His vision of the purpose for a park like Yosemite is articulated in a report written in 1865:

The occasional contemplation of natural scenes of an impressive character, particularly if this contemplation occurs in connection with relief from ordinary cares, change of air and change of habits, is favorable to the health and vigor of men. . . . The want of such occasional recreation where

¹⁴ Runte, *National Parks*, 48-49.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

men and women are habitually pressed by their business or household cares often results in a class of disorders.¹⁶

Many others agreed that the objective of preserving wilderness areas was to provide a beautiful place for visitors to escape civilization and lift their spirits. The words of Cooper's Natty Bumppo were echoed in Olmstead's thoughts and plans.

Olmstead also outlined some basic and far-reaching policies to guide the commission in preserving Yosemite for the people:

The first point to be kept in mind. . . is the preservation and maintenance as exactly as possible of the natural scenery. . . within the narrowest limits consistent with the necessary accommodation of visitors, of all artificial constructions and the prevention of all constructions markedly inharmonious with the scenery. . . . Second: it is important that it should be remembered that in permitting the sacrifice of anything that would be of the slightest value to future visitors to the convenience, bad taste, playfulness, carelessness, or wanton destructiveness of present visitors, we probably yield in each case the interest of uncounted millions to the selfishness of a few individuals.¹⁷

In a far-sighted moment, Olmstead wrote further of the potential harm that might come to the park with a much larger influx of tourists. Writing in 1865, sixteen years after Yosemite had been "discovered" (although previously occupied for eight thousand to three thousand years by Miwok Indians) by the Mariposa Battalion, Olmstead wrote:

Before many years if proper facilities are offered, these hundreds will become thousands and in a century the whole number of visitors will be counted by the millions. An injury to the scenery so slight that it may be unheeded by any visitor now, will be one of deplorable magnitude when its effect upon each visitor's enjoyment is multiplied by these millions.¹⁸

¹⁶ Frederick Law Olmstead, "The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees, A Preliminary Report, 1865," reprinted in Laura Wood Roper, *Landscape Architecture* 43(October 1952): 16-17.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

The values, goals and warnings of Olmstead's report have influenced the guardians of national parks since 1865.

Changing definitions of the value of the parks and the purpose behind their creation and use have led to many debates on how best to manage them. Many preservationists, championed by men such as John Muir, thought that the parks should be conserved as pristine wildernesses. Others felt that the parks existed to serve the public need, and that they should be as accessible as possible to the public for a variety of activities. Throughout the history of the national parks, certain incidents have sparked nation-wide interest in the question of appropriate use of the parks.

The National Park Service

Between 1872, when Yellowstone was created, and 1916, when the National Park Service was created, fourteen parks were created on the Yellowstone model and each needed caretakers.¹⁹ After ten years of looking for strong stewardship for their park, supporters of Yellowstone pressured Congress into taking action. The result was the twenty year guardianship of the national parks by the military. On March 3, 1883, a bill was signed which said:

The Secretary of War, upon the request of the Secretary of the Interior, is hereby authorized and directed to make necessary details of troops to prevent trespassers or intruders from entering the park for the purpose of destroying game or objects of curiosity therein, and to remove such persons from the park if found therein.²⁰

¹⁹ Tolson, *Laws Relating to the National Park Service*.

²⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, *A Bill Authorizing the U.S. Army to Guard Yellowstone National Park*, H.R. 7595, 47th Cong., 2nd sess., 1883, 14:3193, quoted in Tolson, *Laws Relating to the National Park Service*.

Troops were sent to Yellowstone almost immediately to manage the area and enforce the regulations.

The guardianship of the United States military highlighted several questions of management. Their tenure endured political entanglements, disputes over what park regulations should be, and debates over how to organize enforcement and communicate with the public. Their solutions laid the groundwork for many future methods of National Park Service superintendents.

In each park, the local problems of guardianship often required unique, localized solutions. For example, when Cavalry troops arrived in Yosemite National Park in 1891 under the command of Captain A.E. Wood, they encountered a few management problems. Squatters, cattle ranchers, hunters, and sheepherders were all using the national park land as their own. Most problems were gradually resolved under Captain Wood's superintendentship, but the sheepherders proved a lasting thorn in his side because he had little authority to enforce the law in Yosemite. The United States District Attorney declared that no action would be pursued if violators were caught, and so the only form of enforcement the Cavalry could resort to was deporting the sheepherders from the park. The problem was eventually solved by escorting the flocks and the sheepherders in opposite directions out beyond the park boundaries. By the time the flocks and herders found one another again, local predators and the elements had substantially thinned the flock and grazing in Yosemite had become an unprofitable activity.²¹

²¹ David Allen Smith, "Military Participation in the Development of Yosemite National Park" (M.A. Thesis, San Jose State University, 1984), 60-61.

Along with enforcing laws which provided for the preservation of Yosemite, the Cavalry also mapped and surveyed much of the region. For a time they also constructed roads in the park, and repaired existing routes. Among other lasting contributions they set up entrance stations to confiscate firearms from tourists entering the park, posted rules for visitors to see, and fought forest fires often caused by campers who left campfires unattended.²²

While the Cavalry in Yosemite and the other parks were dealing with certain practical problems of guardianship, the debate over the use of public lands had caused a split in the conservation movement. For various reasons, conservation practices in the national parks and in the national forests proceeded down different paths. In 1891, Congress separated the idea of forest conservation, with its stress on utility and public benefit from resources, from the national park idea of stricter preservation.²³ From 1891 onward, the two systems were guarded by different caretakers and organized under different departments of the government, with the Forest Service ending up under the Department of Agriculture. The Cavalry continued to answer to the Department of War and the parks fell under the authority of the Department of the Interior.

During the decades long tenure of the military in the national parks, many officials at the War Department found this particular responsibility increasingly difficult and distracting. More legislation, such as the Antiquities Act of 1906, complicated management of the national parks. The Antiquities Act included legal protection for historic objects on Indian sites. It

²² Ibid., 63-65.

²³ Wirth, *Parks, Politics and the People*, 42.

also included a clause which empowered the President to proclaim as national monuments any lands acquired by the federal government which contained historic landmarks, historic or prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest.²⁴ As a result of the act, more land was added to the system, and more laws had to be enforced in the monuments and parks. Thus, these responsibilities of the military, which had little to do with national defense, continued to increase. However, in 1913-1914 the troops were withdrawn from the parks and the long stewardship of the military ended. Many administrators in the War Department were glad to be relieved of the duty of guardianship.²⁵

For several years, Yosemite and Yellowstone and the other national parks floundered through different official guardianships, none of which lasted very long or had a significant impact on policy. As early as 1912 President Taft sent Congress a message that began, "I earnestly recommend the establishment of a Bureau of National Parks."²⁶ Noting opposition by the Forest Service to the non-utilitarian land use of the parks and lack of Congressional consistency in providing for the parks, this idea drew influential supporters.

It had also come to the public's attention that the national parks had little enforceable protection. Public reaction to the flooding of the Hetch Hetchy Valley within Yosemite's boundaries to make a reservoir for San Francisco was

²⁴ William C. Everhart, *The National Park Service* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), 12.

²⁵ Smith, "Military Participation," 79-80.

²⁶ President Taft, quoted in Everhart, *The National Park Service*, 15.

loud, nation-wide and mostly negative. Outspoken opponents of the dam, led by John Muir, had gained great amounts of public attention after the dam was started in 1913. Due to public outcry and lobbying by preservationists on issues such as Hetch Hetchy, action was finally taken to solidify and empower the management of the National Park System. A new bureau was created.

The legislation which enabled the National Park Service was signed in 1916. It contained the paradox which has been at the heart of national park management ever since. The Park Service was created for a dual purpose:

The service thus established should promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments and reservations hereinafter specified by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purposes of the said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is *to conserve the scenery* and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein and *to provide for the enjoyment of the same* in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. [emphasis mine]²⁷

In 1916, the authors of this bill saw it as an answer to the question of who should best manage these parks, and indeed it was. What the authors could not foresee, however, was that the workable mandate that they enacted into law would become more and more of a contradiction and a challenge with the passing of time. The cultural interpretations of "enjoyment" and "conservation" would alter with the rising numbers of tourists entering the parks.

The initial guidance for the new agency came largely from the energetic direction of Stephen Mather, a western mountaineer and successful businessman. When asked by the Secretary of the Interior, Franklin Lane, to

²⁷ U.S. Congress, *An Act to Establish a National Park Service and for other purposes*, quoted in Stanford E. Demars, *The Tourist in Yosemite, 1855-1985* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991), 2.

give his opinion about the management of the parks, Mather replied rather critically. Lane supposedly replied to him, "If you don't like the way the national parks are run, why don't you come down to Washington and run them yourself?" Mather accepted this challenge and led the National Park Service until 1928.²⁸ During his tenure, the bureau came together in the kind of coordinated administration which had previously been lacking. Under Mather's leadership, park lands were leased to private concessionaires to build modern accommodations; roads were built and repaired (often with Mather's personal funds, as in the case of the Tioga Road in Yosemite); *National Geographic* and other publications began to provide plenty of publicity for the parks; and funding for the Park Service was increased. A pragmatic businessman and conservationist member of the Sierra Club, Mather kept a balance by providing for access and public enjoyment while fighting a popular desire to end strict preservation by using all public lands in utilitarian, profitable ways.

The policies of the National Park Service had their foundations in the work of Steven Mather and the previous military superintendents. However, over time, management policies changed to reflect changing cultural opinions on the best uses for the parks, and a rise in the number of visitors in the parks.

Between 1961 and 1967, visitation to Yosemite alone doubled from one million people to two million annually.²⁹ Changes in infrastructure to

²⁸ Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 414-15.

²⁹ William R. Jones, "Is Yosemite Exciting Enough for the 1970's?" *Yosemite Association Bulletin*, October 1970, 1.

accommodate more visitors during this time included beginning a reservation system for sites in designated campgrounds; discontinuing the popular, if unnatural, firefall (in which a large bonfire was nightly pushed off a two thousand foot cliff); introducing shuttle busses; constructing bicycle paths; and building horse stables, service stations and other conveniences.³⁰

Activities for tourists in the 1960s included swimming in hotel pools, skiing, ice skating, souvenir shopping, drinking in the bars, hiking, bus tours, and golf at two different hotels.

The management of each park changed as each developed a distinctive local management history. Although, in 1916, the parks finally gained a coordinated central administration, the Park Service was historically decentralized. Because each park or monument had a unique past and setting, each park unit also has its own budget, manager and management plan. By the 1970s the National Park Service managed nearly 280 units with a budget of roughly \$400 million.³¹ Each park's superintendent had most of the local decision-making control, although one of the ten regional offices and the headquarters in Washington D.C. had influence as well. Congress, as the creating agency for national parks, and as the final word in the budget, also had considerable sway. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, the position of superintendent was described as "a ship captain. . . others may own the

³⁰ George Hartzog, "Director Hartzog's decisions of January '68 regarding Management of Yosemite Valley," Memorandum, February 1968, Yosemite Research Library.

³¹ Lowry, *The Capacity for Wonder*, 26.

property and determine the cargo, but once away from the dock (or in the field), the captain (or superintendent) makes the decisions."³²

While tourism increased and each park developed its management plan, the ever-changing and multi-faceted question of the purpose of the national parks persisted. Because our culture changes, the "appropriate" ways to use and enjoy our national heritage also change. Parks created for economic, aesthetic, and cultural reasons are used in many different ways, and there is no absolute answer as to which way is best. In the past century, many people felt that the parks had been set aside as places for people to refresh their spirits away from city life; some felt that the parks should be preserved to ensure the survival of complex ecosystems; some felt that the creatures, trees and landscapes in the parks had an innate right to exist without human interference; and others felt that the land should be used for government-regulated mining, lumbering and hunting. The management of land, especially of national parks, is a reflection of the cultural values of a particular era, and these change over time.

Many turning points in policy for the national park system have occurred over the last century. In July of 1970, a riot in Yosemite became one such turning point. Although the riot did not precipitate all of the National Park Service changes in the 1970s, it was an obvious symptom of the social pressures which forced the re-evaluation of the goals and responsibilities of those guarding the parks. The repercussions of the riot included new, standardized policies in administration, interpretation, and law enforcement

³² Ibid., 28-29.

in all of the national parks. Following the catalyst of the riot, Yosemite once again became a proving ground for different policies and new answers to the question of the purposes of national parks.

CHAPTER II

STONEMAN MEADOW, JULY, 1970

The Scene

Stoneman Meadow is a grassy clearing surrounded by California Black Oaks and Ponderosa Pines in the eastern end of Yosemite Valley. Standing in the meadow today you can hear the sound of the Merced River. Other sounds are evident as well, as shuttle buses, tour buses and automobiles cross Stoneman Bridge and turn at the intersection into Curry Village. In the Village, people rent bicycles, order pizzas or book tent-cabins for the night. Bicyclists might ride by on the path at the edge of Stoneman Meadow, or a group of schoolchildren from the Yosemite Institute might be sitting in a circle in the clearing. A spectacular view of the face of Half Dome looms over the scene from the east, Glacier Point is visible on the granite cliffs to the south, and the formation called Royal Arches dominates the granite face of the cliff to the north. On a summer day it is occasionally quiet here, but usually there is ample evidence of activity by the visitors to Yosemite Valley.

In the summer of 1970, a young film student named David Vassar shot footage of the scene in Stoneman Meadow. Except for Half Dome in the background, it is a sight that could have been taken directly from Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. Images of Frisbees flying, motorcycles at the edge of the meadow, large groups engaging in conversation, singing with guitars,

swimming, drinking and smoking are all found in abundance.¹ Many young people were finding in Stoneman Meadow more than an escape from the city to the mountains; they were finding companionship and a good time as well.

Stoneman Meadow had been well-established as a gathering place for youth in previous summers, and it was especially popular on holiday weekends. The *Berkeley Tribe* newspaper called it a place to "smoke dope and sing together in the clear mountain air."² The *Tribe* also mentioned rumors of a "Woodstock West" in Yosemite Valley with bands from the Bay Area, but this never materialized. Instead, many people brought their guitars and shared musical sessions by the river and around campfires. Often, a large number of motorcycles were parked near the meadow. On the 4th of July, 1969, a large number of youth gathered peacefully in the meadow for an impromptu party which had lasted for several days. Over Memorial Day weekend of 1970, the same type of gathering had occurred.

At the time, the activities of the youth in Stoneman Meadow could be seen and heard easily in the adjacent Lower Pines Campground, then known as Camp 14. Camp 14 was a place of friction between the youth and some of the families and traditional campers in the area. Rumors of hippies stealing food from sites were common, and one visitor, Dr. Craycroft, wrote a letter, proclaiming that, "Before this summer of 1970 it had become relatively unsafe. . . to leave any camp gear unattended at any time night or day because of

¹ Footage used in Yosemite: *The Fate of Heaven*, prod. and dir. Jon Else, 58 min., Sundance Institute and Yosemite Association, videocassette.

² *Berkeley Tribe*, 17-24 July, 1970.

theft."³ Another camper, Mrs. E. Ford, wrote of her disgust with the "children" gathered at the meadow and at Camp 14 where she stayed with her family. She described "hippie campsites" in Camp 14 as having twenty-five to sixty people in one site, with many motorcycles roaring through--places where "drunkenness was the order of the day."⁴ Other complaints by disturbed campers included music played late into the night, profanity, nudity, sex and marijuana smoking in the meadow and in the campgrounds.

Residents of Yosemite Valley were aware of the tension as well, although many say that they had few problems with the youth. One problem that several people remember was the frequent presence of groups panhandling outside the Village Store, and occasionally on the roadways. This caused friction not only with local residents doing their grocery shopping, but also with the security guards for the Yosemite Park and Curry Company, which ran the Village Store.⁵ Occasionally the hippies in front of the store would put their legs out on the path to block pedestrians as they asked for loose change. Security guards from the store would usually attempt to disperse them; a minor confrontation would sometimes occur.

The tension between the youth and some of the more traditional rangers and park visitors at the time was certainly a reflection of life outside of Yosemite. The Vietnam War shadowed every political view, and the

³ Dr. Robert Craycroft, to Senator Alan Cranston, 1 September 1970, Yosemite Research Library.

⁴ Mrs. E. Ford, to George Hartzog, Director of the National Park Service, 12 August 1970, Yosemite Research Library.

⁵ See Kerry Maxwell, interview by author, 6 March 1998, Yosemite, tape recording; Clarisa Garza, interview by author, 4 February 1998, Yosemite, tape recording; Marian Woessner, interview by author, 20 January 1998, Yosemite.

polarization of political and social opinions made for a sharp dividing line. As one of the law enforcement rangers explained, "We couldn't talk to each other at that time because it was open hostility. It would have gotten violent, it had gotten violent previous to that."⁶ Some of the Park Service employees and Yosemite residents, however, were quite comfortable with the Stoneman Meadow scene. Among the people who congregated in the meadow were employees of the park, including some of the National Park Service firefighters, who tended to be between eighteen and twenty-four years of age.⁷ Yet most of the youth in the meadow had come from outside the park, from San Francisco or Fresno, Berkeley or Los Angeles.⁸ Along with the desires to commune with nature and make music with friends, they brought resentment over the war and strong anti-establishment sentiments into the park with them.

Even in Yosemite, certain social facts and evidence of the pervasive presence of the establishment were inescapable. Upper class privilege was obvious as the historic Ahwahnee Hotel and the Yosemite Lodge were inaccessible to most younger people because of price. Even the campgrounds were obviously geared toward families and retired people, not youth. Some said that the parks were undeniably for the materialistic and lazy, since they were surrounded by automobiles, roadways, souvenir shops and hotels in their nature sanctuary. Many of the so-called straights questioned these same

⁶ Maxwell, interview.

⁷ Bob Roney, interview by author, 3 February 1998, Yosemite, tape recording.

⁸ National Park Service, "Arrest and Crime Statistics - July 2-5, 1970," Yosemite Research Library.

management practices at the same time. Stanford Demars, describing a visit to Yosemite in 1968, tells of the "barbed-wire enclosed bastion of elitism that was the Ahwahnee Hotel. Standing on the underprivileged side of the fence. . . I felt angry and frustrated."⁹ Demars and other visitors also openly questioned the way that the "noisily vulgar marijuana smokers" treated the park.¹⁰ It appeared to many on both sides that neither those playing golf at the Ahwahnee nor those partying in Stoneman Meadow were properly appreciating the scenery. Again and again in letters and books, the question of what constituted appropriate use of the parks, and whose opinion was more viable, arose. The question of who the parks belonged to and how they should be managed may or may not have been openly discussed by the youth, but tensions between those who wanted to use Stoneman Meadow as a hippie-type gathering place and those who wanted to see the park used in only traditional ways grew.

These generally incompatible groups, forced into close proximity in Stoneman Meadow and Camp 14, had caused friction and management problems prior to July 4th, 1970. The most obvious example occurred over Memorial Day weekend in 1970, over a month before the riot. On this weekend, according an investigator's report and several statements from law enforcement rangers, several hundred youth gathered in the meadow. Complaints from other visitors about this group centered on noise, drug use, fights, profanity, nudity, and sex. It was also illegal in 1970, as it is today, to camp in Yosemite outside of designated campsites, or without a wilderness permit.

⁹ Demars, *The Tourist in Yosemite*, 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Among the youth, there was some resentment expressed over the fee system for the campgrounds. The charge was \$3.00 per day for a campsite, with a maximum of six people, and there was an extra charge of \$2.00 to have a vehicle at the site. Only one vehicle was allowed per site. The additional costs, and restrictions on the number of people per site, caused annoyance for the young people who were often short on cash.¹¹ At this point no attempt had been made to open a dialog with the people in the meadow to see if these problems could be worked out, the rules explained, or alternatives reviewed by both sides.

On May 29th, 1970, estimates of the size of the crowd of youth at Stoneman Meadow, and spilling over into Camp 14 varied from three hundred to fifteen hundred.¹² During a briefing for the night shift, Supervisory Ranger Dave Patterson informed eight other rangers that they would going to the Stoneman Meadow area because they had been asked to issue citations for illegal parking. The nine men were joined by several off-duty rangers, and they all proceeded to the meadow. Because a road adjacent to the meadow had signs announcing that it was closed to parking from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m., the rangers planned to walk down the row of parked cars and issue tickets in an attempt to get the crowd to remove their vehicles and generally disperse. At about 6:45 p.m. Ranger Pete Thompson announced over a public address system that the cars would be

¹¹ Kenneth C. Tapman, "Investigation Report on July 4, 1970, Incident at Yosemite National Park," 2, Yosemite Research Library.

¹² Ibid., 3.

ticketed. As people saw citations being written, about forty to fifty people did move their cars.¹³

At this point the rangers had a force of about twenty-five to twenty-seven men and they decided to clear the remaining people out of the meadow. The statements of the law enforcement rangers note that they intentionally took a "soft approach" because they were outnumbered. They did succeed in dispersing the group with announcements over the public address system that the meadow would be cleared of "all disorderly people."¹⁴ The youth, who did not wish to discontinue socializing at 7 p.m. in the evening on their holiday weekend, moved their music, conversation, drinking and smoking back into the campgrounds. The rangers spent the rest of the night as foot patrols of three or four men walking through Camps 11, 12, 14 and 15 where many of the youth were camped. Several arrests were made of "intoxicated and disorderly" individuals on the night of the 29th.¹⁵ Resentment among the people in the meadow grew as they believed that the families and "straights" could gather in the park without being hassled and they could not. As one person in the meadow put it, "Hired assassin rangers are trying to rob us of our last sanctuaries."¹⁶

On the next day, May 30th, Park Service personnel went to Camp 14 and Stoneman Meadow to quiet the situation again. According to the records, their

¹³ See Dave Patterson, "Statement, June 1, 1970," Yosemite Research Library; Pete Thompson, "Statement, June 1, 1970," Yosemite Research Library.

¹⁴ Thompson, "Statement."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Berkeley Tribe*, July 17-24.

return was due to "a lot of noise and disorder" created by the young people. When the rangers announced that they would be ticketing cars, the answering jeer from the crowd was heard at the Camp Curry registration desk five hundred yards away.¹⁷ The rangers cited many cars under the "No Parking 7PM - 6AM" sign, but not one vehicle was moved by its owner. When a tow truck which had been requested by the rangers began towing cars, the noise from the crowd increased. At 7:30 p.m., rangers, several F.B.I. agents and a few men from the Justice Department started moving into the meadow from all four sides. After an announcement on a public address system, only a few people left the meadow. Many individuals announced that they would not leave the meadow, and they moved from where they were sitting back into the crowd.¹⁸

At 8:15 p.m., an attempt was again made to disperse the crowd. Ranger Don Utterback arrested an "intoxicated and disorderly" individual named Steven F. Temps. As Utterback and other rangers tried to take their prisoner to a patrol car, the crowd began to shout, demanding that the rangers turn him loose. Some people then threw rocks and bottles, but none of the rangers were hit. As Pete Thompson explained the crowd's reaction to the arrest, "The immediate response was peace signs and smiles --but there were many knives present. . . the crowd forced us out of the meadow."¹⁹ At this point the rangers and other law enforcement agents began to retreat, as Don Utterback described:

¹⁷ Patterson, "Statement."

¹⁸ See Don Utterback, "Statement, June 2, 1970," Yosemite Research Library; Thompson, "Statement;" Patterson, "Statement."

¹⁹ Thompson, "Statement."

After we had retreated about 25 yards I noticed an individual. . . in the front line of the advancing mob pull a knife from a sheath. . . . I told him to drop the knife. He refused to do so and aimed the point of the blade directly at me at waist level. . . . I could not hear what he said when I told him to drop the knife, for the mob was making too much noise. I drew the mace from my holster and pointed it directly at his face without discharging it. . . I planned to use the mace first and my revolver second if I fell or was stopped from retreating. . . .²⁰

All of the rangers returned to their patrol cars and left the meadow. Because the rangers did not feel they had enough staff to control the situation, they did not return to the meadow until much later. As Law Enforcement Ranger James O'Toole explained:

As we were chased out of the meadow on Memorial Day, we called the situation off and let the young people take over the whole area with the theory that before long most would be drunk and eventually pass out from all the alcohol and narcotics being consumed, and we could then go through and pick up those left making noise. At 2 a.m., we were able to enter the back of Camp 14 without being noticed too much, but still large groups of people were playing bongo drums, being disorderly and causing destruction to various property, including some of their own.²¹

The situation quieted after the rangers were driven from the meadow and traffic was routed around the area. As the crowds receded at the end of the weekend, Yosemite Valley became fairly calm again.

However, in light of the events over Memorial Day weekend, some preparations were made for the 4th of July. Rumors of the supposed "Woodstock West" concert were brought to the attention of the Yosemite administration by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. These rumors prompted a letter sent on June 30th from Yosemite's superintendent to the Operations and Readiness Division of the Sixth Army in San Francisco. The letter inquired if the army would send Federal troops into the park if

²⁰ Utterback, "Statement."

²¹ James O'Toole, "Statement, July 7, 1970," 3, Yosemite Research Library.

necessary. It concluded with the statement, "I am concerned about the impact the adverse element of our society is placing on the park."²² In a memo sent to his staff on July 2nd, Richard Marks, Yosemite's Chief Ranger, listed the telephone numbers for the Sixth Army to call in case of an emergency situation. At the bottom of this memo he noted that, "This does not mean we want to notify them every time a bottle is thrown or someone is arrested, but when the build up is such that we would not be able to control it with the resources on hand."²³ Despite making these inquiries about Federal troops, the administration in Yosemite did not follow proper procedures by notifying the Department of the Army, through the Secretary of the Army, with final approval by the President. For this reason efforts to get assistance from the army on the July 4th weekend failed.

Meanwhile, other methods of dealing with the youth were attempted. On June 17, a memo entitled "Statement of emphasis on law enforcement," was issued by the Assistant Superintendent's office. It asked that personnel "renew their efforts and tighten up their enforcement attitude."²⁴ The body of the memo listed several infractions which were to be more strictly enforced. Among them were hitchhiking, faulty vehicle equipment, unimproved mufflers, out-of-bounds camping, and having pets off leash. These illegal activities were all particularly associated with motorcyclists and hippie youth. To make the point very clear, the memo also said:

²² Lawrence C. Hadley, Superintendent, Yosemite National Park, to Lt. Col. Wilmot A. Hall Jr., Sixth Army, 30 June 1970, Yosemite Research Library.

²³ Richard Marks, Memorandum, 2 July 1970, Yosemite Research Library.

²⁴ Russel K. Olson, Memorandum, 17 June 1970, Yosemite Research Library.

Previously a warning was felt to suffice (in many cases it still will), but a warning now represents an attitude of weakness to the younger age group frequenting the Park at an accelerated rate. This complete disregard for our regulations and the National Park Service in particular is of great concern and must be dealt with by stronger means.²⁵

Attached to the back of the memo was a copy of the portions of the Code of Federal Regulations pertaining to the crimes listed above.

Looking at the scene in 1970 and today, it is important to remember that human events in Yosemite reflect of the world outside the park's entrance stations. Social and political changes in any decade affect policy-makers in the parks. The changes that occurred after the July 4th riot in Stoneman Meadow may have been precipitated by the incident, but the riot itself was one symptom of tensions which had been building in the park and the country for several years. An evolution in policy concerning public land may have occurred even without the riot. As Ranger Bob Roney cautioned, "It may have all been coincidental to the riot, it is possible that the change was just due."²⁶

In the months and years following July 1970, however, the riot became a focal point for discussions and investigations on what the Park Service needed to change to meet the needs of the people and protect the parks. With this in mind, what follows is a description of the events of July 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, 1970, in Yosemite Valley. Although the chronology and details in the official reports and statements of witnesses do not always agree, it is hopefully close to what actually occurred.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Roney, interview.

The Riot

Thursday, July 2nd, 1970. Tensions between traditional visitors and rangers and hippie youth increased over the 4th of July holiday weekend in the overcrowded Valley. The Park Service administrators in Yosemite continued to be confronted with what they considered to be an inappropriate use of the park by certain young people. Meanwhile the youth gathered at Stoneman Meadow again, attempting to fill the area with "peaceful, happy people."

The Yosemite administration decided on a course of action. On July 1st, at a meeting in Assistant Superintendent Russel Olson's office, rangers decided that the meadow would have a curfew of 7 p.m. to enforce camping regulations and quiet hours. It was also decided that litter, trampled grass and ecological damage to the area, drug use and noise justified dispersing the crowd with citations and arrests, if necessary. On July 2nd, between 8:30 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. signs were posted to notify those in the meadow of the curfew. The signs said, "This area is closed from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. due to excessive noise and litter."²⁷

As the investigators from Washington later noted in their report on the riot, "The young people were, in effect prohibited from congregating to do 'their thing' unless they did so within the campgrounds, in close proximity to other visitors. . . . This decision also forced the younger generation into the campground 3 hours earlier, intensifying conflict with other park visitors."²⁸

Despite some friction with the Park Service, several hundred people met in the meadow on July 2nd. At various times during the day, nine people were

²⁷ Captain Franklin A. Arthur, "Report to Kenneth Tapman, Investigator, 31 August 1970," 3, Yosemite Research Library.

²⁸ Tapman, "Investigation Report," 4.

arrested in the meadow and in the campgrounds on charges of disorderly conduct, drunkenness, narcotics violations and assault on an arresting officer.²⁹ Three of those arrested were juveniles.³⁰ During the evening the group in the meadow quietly dispersed at about 10:00 p.m. at the request of rangers who came out into the meadow on foot and spoke to people. Apparently there was some opposition to the curfew as obscenities were yelled at the people clearing the meadow, but no major or violent confrontations occurred. Most of the people retired to Camp 14 where it was reported that things were quiet by 11:30 p.m.³¹

Friday, July 3rd, 1970. On Friday the 3rd the number of people in the park greatly increased, and so did the number of youth gathered at Stoneman Meadow. Arrests in Yosemite Valley increased as well, with sixteen people charged with disorderly conduct, drunkenness, narcotics, and one case of theft.³² Not all of the arrests were of youth, or of people near Stoneman Meadow. At the Superintendent's order, the signs had remained up announcing that a curfew of 7 p.m. would be enforced in the meadow.

In the evening on July 3rd, Park Service preparations increased. Assistant Superintendent Olson approved a plan to utilize horses to clear the meadow, if

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Arrest and Crime Statistics."

³¹ National Park Service, Staff Meeting Minutes, Yosemite Lodge, 8:30 a.m., 7 July 1970, 1, Yosemite Research Library.

³² "Arrest and Crime Statistics."

necessary.³³ The horse patrol consisted of thirteen horsemen, four of whom were rangers and the rest of whom were foremen and packers.

According to most estimates, a crowd of about three hundred people gathered at the meadow that evening. At 7:30 p.m. Ranger James Romig spoke to them over the public address system on one of the ranger vehicles. The announcement to disperse was made several times with little result.³⁴ After fifteen or twenty minutes, the horsemen and Park Service employees on foot moved in. Kerry Maxwell, currently a law enforcement ranger in the Wawona District of Yosemite, was a twenty-four year old packer at the time. He worked for the government stables in Yosemite Valley and was on horseback that night:

They decided to try to remove them from the meadow in the evening hours. And so they decided that horses might be a good way to do that and they wanted to recruit people who worked with horses, and of course that was us. . . . So they got some of us from the government stable and some of us from the Company stables and dressed us up in uniform. . . and we formed a skirmish line with our horses. And they weren't expecting that. The horses came out of the trees and they all exited the meadow really peacefully, pretty peacefully.³⁵

After the sweep of the meadow by the horses and men on foot several of the rangers spoke with people in Camp 14 at the request of some of the people who had been in the meadow. The rangers' view of this conversation was presented at a later meeting:

The group in the camp expressed the desire to talk with someone regarding rules, etc., and in honor of that request, Rangers spent time talking with them and explaining the reasons for the request to clear the meadow and

³³ Arthur, "Report," 3.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Maxwell, interview.

suggesting alternatives, such as going to Sentinel Beach. While some appeared to be interested in the ecology side of the picture, and some in the idea of going to Sentinel Beach, the majority soon became bored and congregated in groups of 75-100 and began partying again.³⁶

However, the discussion was not designed to hear both sides. As another view suggests, "The discussion was merely a reiteration of the existing rules and curfew with no hint of any recourse or exploration of alternatives. This rationale for clearing the meadow was not accepted by the majority of the young people involved."³⁷ The Sentinel Beach alternative was not accepted for several reasons. Many people did not know where it was (a few miles downstream on the Merced River, easily accessible from the road and away from the traditional campers), and most people were not interested in leaving the action or their nearby campsites at Camp 14.³⁸ In later review, administrators reasoned that the orders by Ranger Romig to clear the meadow and reassemble at Sentinel Beach may have been "vague, too detailed and left people unsure as to what was expected of them."³⁹

The campgrounds were basically peaceful that night except for a few individual confrontations and arrests. Again, however, resentment was growing on both sides of the issue.

³⁶ Staff Meeting Minutes, 7 July 1970, 1.

³⁷ Tapman, "Investigation Report," 5.

³⁸ Robert Barbee, "Statement of Robert D. Barbee, July 3-4, 1970, Stoneman Meadow, Hippies - Rangers & Confrontation," 4, Yosemite Research Library.

³⁹ Arthur, "Report," 4.

Saturday, July 4th, 1970. During the day on July 4th, both the Park Service employees and the youth in the meadow continued their previous activities. Rangers issued tickets for loud mufflers at 12:08 p.m., 12:52 p.m., and 2:00 p.m. to youth on motorcycles or in cars.⁴⁰ Several people in the meadow, while being videotaped by David Vassar and John Saunders, took the curfew signs from Stoneman Meadow and tossed them into the Merced River.⁴¹ At 1:10 p.m., several rangers picked a sign up out of the river and returned it to the meadow.⁴² Despite all of this activity, some attempt at communication was made by the people in the meadow during the day, and the Park Service responded.

During the weekend of July 4th, Robert D. Barbee, the Staff Resources Management Specialist for Yosemite, was serving as the guide for Lyle McDowell of the Park Service's Washington Office as they inspected various resource management projects and problems. Because McDowell was also interested in Yosemite's social problems, the two men had witnessed the clearing of the meadow on July 3rd. At about noon on July 4th, Chief Ranger Marks telephoned Barbee and asked if he would be willing to go into the meadow as part of a team to talk with the youth. Three or four teams of two people were set up to walk into the meadow and explain the Park Service position, and also offer the alternative of going to Sentinel Beach at 7:00 p.m.⁴³

⁴⁰ National Park Service, "Dispatcher's Log of Events: 12 noon Saturday 7/4 - 12 noon Sunday 7/5," Yosemite Research Library.

⁴¹ *Yosemite: The Fate of Heaven*, Videocassette.

⁴² "Dispatcher's Log of Events."

⁴³ Barbee, "Statement," 2-3.

Barbee entered the meadow with his partner Owen Hoffman, a ranger-naturalist, at about 3:00 p.m. They estimated that there were about two hundred people in the area. Barbee and his partner had no trouble engaging in conversation; many individuals and groups approached them with a variety of questions and comments. Barbee recorded in a later statement that there were no threatening gestures at any time. His description of the afternoon is as follows:

At this time the meadow was peaceful with groups gathered about talking, singing, tossing frizbies [*sic*] and playing various musical instruments. There was unquestionably drugs being used openly (mostly pot smoking), but that did not appear to dominate the scene. Wine drinking was especially common with many obviously underage people taking part. We made no effort to question anyone about this for obvious reasons.

Questions and comments centered around why they were being harassed and especially why they had to "split" at 7:00 p.m. We made every effort to explain that *this type of use was not what the National Parks were dedicated to encouraging* -- this, in addition to the noise and litter, and general disruption that was being caused in an area of intensive visitor concentration. [emphasis mine]⁴⁴

During the course of the afternoon, Barbee noted two distinct currents in the crowd. One group of youth impressed him with their sincerity and philosophical conversations; others displayed a constant air of hostility about the inflexible position of the administration. In general, not many were interested in the Sentinel Beach option.

While talking in the meadow, Barbee and the other rangers were voluntarily filmed by David Vassar and John Saunders. Saunders and Vassar told Barbee that the tape would be available to anyone who wanted to see it, including those in the Park Service. Vassar had actually been arrested the night before but, according to Barbee, he "did not seem to harbor any

⁴⁴ Ibid., 3-4.

animosity."⁴⁵ As 7:00 p.m. approached, however, it became obvious that the conversations in the meadow would not head off a confrontation that evening.

The decision to clear the meadow by force if necessary had already been made at Park Headquarters despite the fact that the administrators knew that they could not hold the meadow if challenged or if violence broke out.⁴⁶ Planning and timing for the clearing of the meadow were left up to the night shift supervisor, Dave Patterson, and Assistant District Ranger Pete Thompson instead of the Superintendent, Chief Ranger, or law enforcement personnel with more experience in dealing with potentially volatile mobs. Their only guidance in creating a plan was an order from the Superintendent's Office to clear the meadow. They decided to use the same tactics as the night before.⁴⁷

By 7:00 p.m., the signs in the meadow were manned by rangers and other Park Service employees. A public address system on a vehicle was set up by Curry Village. Meanwhile, a CBS news team took a position with their cameras in the front row of the spectators.⁴⁸ Short and unambiguous announcements were made to clear the meadow, and a few people left. Meanwhile, fireworks were being set off, a motorcycle was driving around on the meadow, and the crowd was getting noisier. A crowd of spectators pressed in at the edges of the meadow, effectively blocking most escape routes from the scene.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶ Tapman, "Investigation Report," 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁸ Barbee, "Statement," 5.

Fifteen to twenty minutes later the horses moved out into the meadow in an attempt to break up the crowd. The horses moved at a moderate pace at first, then charged into the crowd followed by twenty-one Park Service men on foot. The sixteen men on horseback included Curry Company employees, N.P.S. firefighters, maintenance men, packers and rangers. They had mace and ropes as weapons. All of the mace was expended during the charge and the subsequent retreat.⁴⁹ During the charge, witnesses say that some of the men on horseback waved lariats in the air and yelled in a fashion that was used to herd cattle. In response, the crowd threw bottles and rocks, at least one person threw a knife, and one brandished an ax at a ranger. People ran in all directions, and the scene quickly became violent and chaotic.⁵⁰

Kerry Maxwell was on horseback that night and remembers the scene:

They were telling us that they wanted to do the same thing. . . . Not scare them, you know, but show our force. . . . We came up to form the skirmish line in about the same area that we did the day before. Everybody was scared and it seemed like the crowd was a lot more tense. . . . And they were announcing over the loudspeaker for them to move, and of course they had had all day to get high and drink, and so they wouldn't move. . . . Somebody yelled "Charge." And so we charged. But then it just turned into a big fiasco, people were running everywhere, they were scattered and then they reorganized.⁵¹

The rangers in the meadow, including those on horseback, retreated in the face of the violence of the crowd. Maxwell remembers trying to put his horse between the crowd and the rangers on foot so that they could get out of the meadow. Robert Barbee and other spectators later remembered that they were

⁴⁹ Tapman, "Investigation Report," 6.

⁵⁰ Arthur, "Report," 4-5.

⁵¹ Maxwell, interview.

shocked and disturbed by the galloping horse charge into the crowd of young people, saying that from an observer's standpoint "it was a bad show."⁵²

As the rangers withdrew from the meadow in disorder and confusion, many of their vehicles had their windows shattered with rocks. Several of the rangers made their way to a Yosemite Park and Curry Company bus, and the driver took them straight out of the area. At 7:40 p.m., all personnel were ordered to fall back and move out of the area.⁵³ Ranger Marks ordered all rangers to regroup at Park Headquarters, located a few miles west of the riot near the Visitor Center and the auditoriums.⁵⁴

Ranger James O'Toole attempted to escape in a patrol car with Ranger Dave Patterson:

In moving out. . . a group of young people ran over toward the car in an effort to tip it over. It was necessary for Ranger Patterson to drive the car right through the middle of the group to afford us the only possible escape route. By the time we had gone the distance of about one block, the patrol car had had its windows smashed out, its lights torn apart, and was a general disaster.⁵⁵

O'Toole and Patterson returned quickly to the Park Headquarters/ Visitor Center area.

As they regrouped, the rangers set up roadblocks at the Ahwahnee Bridge, Sentinel Bridge, the intersection near the Village Store and the El Capitan junction, stopping all traffic to and from the meadow. Those who manned the barricades, including rangers, maintenance people and firefighters, were at

⁵² Barbee, "Statement," 6.

⁵³ "Dispatcher's Log of Events," 2.

⁵⁴ Arthur, "Report," 5.

⁵⁵ O'Toole, "Statement," 3.

this point issued ax handles as weapons.⁵⁶ Meanwhile in the meadow, a hastily drawn sign which said "People's Park" had replaced the curfew sign and many of the youth gathered in the center of the meadow to celebrate the retreat of the rangers.⁵⁷

As the rangers were leaving the meadow and setting up road blocks, a group of people from the meadow set up a road block of their own. Several people went into the Curry intersection near Stoneman Bridge and built a bonfire in the middle of the roadway. By 8:45 p.m., no traffic could get through the intersection without being stopped by rioters.⁵⁸ One case of beer was reportedly taken from a car. An American flag was ripped off another. A Cadillac was stoned, and the driver was struck with a rock.⁵⁹ At 9:20 p.m., a male visitor to the park from the town of Foresta was hit in the head with a rock at the intersection and had to be hospitalized.⁶⁰

After a call for assistance, many local police forces sent help. At about 10:00 p.m., Sheriff Norm Garrett of Mariposa County came into the park and neared a Park Service road block near Sentinel Bridge, a few miles west of the riot. One of the men on the roadblock apparently waved his hand to greet him. Unfortunately, the Sheriff misunderstood the hand gesture--taking it to mean that he and his deputy should continue along the same road, which led straight

⁵⁶ Arthur, "Report," 5.

⁵⁷ Dr. John Fisher, open letter to President Nixon, 22 July 1970, 4, Yosemite Research Library.

⁵⁸ "Dispatcher's Log of Events," 2.

⁵⁹ Tapman, "Investigation Report," 7.

⁶⁰ "Dispatcher's Log of Events," 2.

to the rioters' roadblock at the Curry intersection. Rioters stopped his car as they threw logs in front of it and behind it. The crowd threw many rocks and bottles at the car, broke the windows with sticks and rocks and pulled the Sheriff out of the car. At this point, Garrett and Deputy Scott both fired several shots into the air in an attempt to clear the crowd and get away. Sheriff Garrett suffered lacerations to his head and possibly had his revolver stolen during the incident.⁶¹ According to one account, the Sheriff and Deputy eventually drove away.⁶² However, many witnesses later reported seeing the immobile and abandoned car near the roadblock. Apparently, the rioters rolled the vehicle down an embankment and there were attempts by some of the crowd to set it on fire.⁶³

Robert Barbee witnessed the incident involving the Sheriff:

About 9:30, I decided to make my way back to headquarters. . . . Several people I had been talking with (all hippie types) decided to accompany me back to "our lines"; apparently they were concerned for my safety. . . . I decided to take my shirt off (I was in uniform) to avoid any problems. As we approached Stoneman Bridge I heard a vehicle coming Code 3. As it approached the bridge a sizable number of the "hard core" (about 75) were waiting with rocks and bottles. They let fly as soon as the car was over the bridge. Much confusion followed and I distinctly heard someone yell, "They're shooting in the air." The three people I was with and myself hit the ground behind a tree. I had no idea at the time who was in the car or how in the world they had got into the situation.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *Mariposa Gazette*, 9 July 1970.

⁶³ Maxwell, interview; Roney, interview.

⁶⁴ Barbee, "Statement," 6-7.

By the morning of July 5th, many other units besides the Mariposa Sheriff had responded. Park Service dispatchers warned them by radio about the rioters' roadblock.

The outside agencies which responded to the call for help by the Yosemite administration included the Madera County Sheriff's Office, the Merced County Sheriff's Office, the Fresno Country Sheriff's Office, the Fresno Police Department, the Merced Police Department, and the United States Marshals. There were 146 individuals present from these agencies.⁶⁵ Most of the other districts in Yosemite National Park had sent employees in to assist in the Valley as well.

Bob Roney was a fire guard in 1970, working on the Hodgdon Meadows Fire Crew in Yosemite. His crew assembled and prepare to go to the Valley late on the night of the 4th:

We were informed that there had been a riot, and we were needed down there immediately. . . . We purposely took the route to Curry Village and then crossed Stoneman Bridge to get to the Visitor Center because we were kind of interested in seeing what was up. . . . So we went over Stoneman Bridge and there were red lights all over the place, and there was a vehicle over the side of the road, some kind of police vehicle. We drove up to the front of the Visitor Center. . . . Parked there in front of the Visitor Center was a ranger car with its windows broken out of it. . . . We were assembled by the ranger force, issued ax handles and mace and were told to hang around the Visitor Center in case something happened.⁶⁶

By the time Roney and his crew arrived, most of the Park Service personnel had been issued ax handles as weapons. The East Auditorium had been opened as a place to process prisoners, and meetings were being held to decide on the next course of action.

⁶⁵ James O'Toole, Memorandum to the Valley District Manager, 5 February 1971, Yosemite Research Library.

⁶⁶ Roney, interview.

At about midnight, many of the police and sheriffs who had responded from outlying counties and cities were sworn in as Deputy U.S. Marshals and as Deputy Park Rangers. With the Yosemite rangers, they patrolled the campgrounds and arrested anyone they could find in violation of park regulations.⁶⁷ However, no law enforcement personnel went to the rioters' road block where fireworks were being set off.

Many Park Service personnel, most of whom were not trained in procedures for processing prisoners, remained in the East Auditorium to assist there. Busloads of prisoners were eventually brought back to the East Auditorium. Bob Roney remembers the scene and his reaction:

The fire guards in those days tended to be a pretty liberal group. They were usually between eighteen and twenty-two. . . . We hung around waiting for orders. I was a little bit upset about the whole thing. I had brought my first aid kit, it was a very large first aid kit in my backpack, fearing that I might have to use it, and I was more interested in doing that than in using an ax handle.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, the crowd in the meadow was beginning to disperse because it was late in the night. At some point before the group in the meadow broke up for the night, however, the Camp 14 kiosk was destroyed and the cash registers were vandalized.⁶⁹

The majority of the people arrested in the late night hours of July 4th and the early morning hours of July 5th were charged with disorderly conduct, assault on an officer, public drunkenness, and illegal camping. There were also about twenty narcotics cases. The offenders went the next day to the

⁶⁷ Arthur, "Report," 5.

⁶⁸ Roney, interview.

⁶⁹ "Dispatcher's Log of Events."

Fresno Juvenile Hall or to the Fresno County Jail. On July 4th, eleven people were arrested, two juveniles and nine adults. But on July 5th, between the hours of midnight and 8:00 a.m., one hundred and thirty eight people were arrested as the patrols of law enforcement agents combed the campgrounds for people engaged in illegal activities.⁷⁰ During the night, the medical clinic treated seven riot related cases, one person with a drug induced coma, one with a foot injury, one with a back injury, two with head injuries, and two with injuries sustained while resisting arrest.⁷¹

In the East Auditorium, the arrest procedures were not well organized and it was often difficult to identify the arresting officer from the paperwork. This confusion later resulted in the dismissal of many charges. Law enforcement personnel incorrectly inventoried property , and conducted searches in the campgrounds in an illegal manner. Vehicles leaving the riot area were also searched illegally, under the premise that a state of emergency existed and constitutional rights were thus suspended. These searches went on despite that fact that martial law was never officially declared.⁷² Several people also claimed that unnecessary force occurred in some of the arrests. Some of these reports were confirmed by Dr. James Wurgler who was working with the prisoners the East Auditorium. Dr. Wurgler stated that he personally cut loose some of the plastic handcuffs because they were cutting off the circulation to the hands of the prisoners. He also treated one person for lacerations after the

⁷⁰ "Arrest and Crime Statistics," 2.

⁷¹ O'Toole, Memorandum, 5 February 1971.

⁷² Tapman, "Investigation Report," 8.

prisoner had thrown a punch at one of the rangers and the ranger struck him in the face.⁷³

On July 5th, administrators decided that the U.S. Marshals would remain in the park for a few days to keep the peace, and that Camp 14 would close for one day to assess the damage. By mid-day on July 5th, the situation had calmed. It was Sunday, and many visitors were leaving the park at the end of the holiday weekend. But echoes of the events over these few days would have many repercussions to come.

⁷³ Ibid., 6.

CHAPTER III

REPERCUSSIONS

Public Reaction

For both the public and the Park Service administration, the events of the July 4th holiday weekend were a focal points for opinionated debates and discussions. Most people viewed the riot through existing biases. It cemented certain beliefs about the establishment and about the actions of the youth in the late 1960s. In both the riot and in the public debate that followed, certain individuals on both sides of the issue succumbed to the belief that the actions of those people on the other side justified violence. The riot seemed to some an example of barbaric behavior by the government against peaceful young people; others used it as an example of barbaric behavior by the youth against other campers, rangers and the park itself. Many people sought to understand the incident and find solutions to the problems of overcrowding in the parks and friction between different groups of park visitors.

Footage of the riot aired on television on July 5th, 1970. The newspapers of major cities in California and across the country picked up the story by Sunday, the 5th, or Monday, the 6th. On Sunday, the *Fresno Bee's* front page announced "500 Youths Go On Yosemite Rampage." The article provided descriptions of violence by the youth followed by a reassuring quote from the Mariposa County Undersheriff, who said, "Everything is under control. I can assure you that no one employed by the Yosemite Park and Curry Company is

in any danger."¹ A July 6th article in the *Fresno Bee* reassured vacationers heading to the mountains that U.S. Marshals would remain in Yosemite to keep the peace.² On the same day, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that most of the long-haired youth arrested were from the Los Angeles area, which did not prove to be true.³ The *San Francisco Chronicle* stated that "A wild rampage by several hundred hippie-type youths ended yesterday morning after a night of skirmishes with lawmen."⁴ Many papers carried similar statements.

Much of the widely publicized reaction to the riot by the public and the media centered around an open letter from a Florida physician and eyewitness to the riot named Dr. John Fisher. Dr. Fisher, who had twice been a Republican member of the Florida Senate, sent his letter to the attention of President Nixon, the Secretary of the Interior and the Director of the Park Service. He also had it published in many newspapers, especially in Florida and California. The letter prompted many heated responses from other eyewitnesses, and it helped launch the government investigation of the incident from Washington D.C.

In his letter, Fisher briefly outlined his family's experiences during a visit to the park on the 4th of July weekend. His description began with a narration of his reaction to the location of their assigned campsite--right next to

¹ *Fresno Bee*, 5 July 1970.

² *Fresno Bee*, 6 July 1970.

³ *Los Angeles Times*, 6 July 1970; "Arrest and Crime Statistics," 2.

⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 July 1970.

Stoneman Meadow and the hippies. He worried about his family's proximity to the crowds of youth. However, his doubts soon faded:

Such apprehension was soon dispelled, however, as we found these long-haired, oddly-dressed children to be more polite than most of my youngsters' college friends who visit our home. The campground was neat and orderly, and altogether one of the most friendly and pleasant that we visited. . . .

In the evenings before supper I would take my two year old son over to the meadow and we would watch them throw Frisbees. . . and sing songs in small groups around a guitar.⁵

Fisher then questioned the purpose of the curfew in the meadow. He moved on to the events of July 3rd, saying that, "Before my very eyes we watched these children stampeded, several being clubbed, and two thrown to the ground, handcuffed, and led off to jail. Their crime I could not see. . . ." ⁶ Dr. Fisher described the July 4th clearing of the meadow:

Without any warning, the horsemen suddenly burst forth in a pack, riding their iron-shod steeds directly into the midst of the seated assembly, at full gallop, scattering those who were fortunate enough not to be run over. . . . The foot troops then moved in with their clubs, while the horsemen circled about and returned swinging lariats and belts. In one moment the peaceful meadow had been changed into a sickening spectacle by these "peace" officers. . . . The park service and its rangers had the riot they wanted at last.⁷

Fisher's long letter included many such passages condemning the actions of the rangers and praising the young people in the meadow. In his opinion, the peaceable young people had been deliberately provoked into violence.

Response to this widely publicized account was heated. Other eyewitnesses responded with letters to the President, Congress and their local newspapers.

⁵ Fisher, to President Nixon.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Doreen Bradley, also an eyewitness to the riot, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Sacramento Bee* after the newspaper had published Fisher's report. Regarding Fisher's letter, she said, "What could possibly be his intent to so completely distort facts!"⁸ She then gave her own eyewitness account of many illegal and intoxicated acts by the people in the meadow. Another eyewitness, Mrs. E. Ford, also responded to Fisher's published account. In a letter to the Director of the Park Service, she said, "Dr. Fisher's account of the events in Yosemite were [sic] almost unbelievable. I have read his account several times Never have I read such a flagrant untrue account of an event."⁹ Like Doreen Bradley, Mrs. Ford related her fearful experiences with the youth, especially citing cases of public drunkenness, "filthy and vile conversations," and "immoral conduct."¹⁰

Many other letters, written by concerned citizens of the same frame of mind, followed. Dr. Robert Craycroft, in a letter to the Secretary of the Interior, took the opposite view of his fellow physician, Dr. Fisher. In his view, the gatherings in the meadow were destructive:

Marijuana could be smelled freely at all of these meetings, and heroin and L.S.D. were also available. In fact, one of the main purposes of the meetings was to sell, distribute and use these drugs. . . . I can no longer distinguish by appearance between so-called hippies, hard-core hoodlums, drug addicts, ordinary thieves and social anarchists. . . . One thing is clear, however, none of them are in Yosemite to experience its natural wonders.¹¹

⁸ Doreen Bradley, letter to the editor, *Sacramento Bee*, 17 August 1970.

⁹ Ford, to George Hartzog.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Craycroft, to Senator Alan Cranston.

In light of this opinion of the people in the meadow, Craycroft's view of the riot reads quite differently than Fisher's. He expressed gratitude for the new campground regulations and fees instituted in 1969 and 1970, which he felt reduced the numbers of "hippie-hoodlums" in the park. Craycroft's letter continued with eyewitness descriptions of rangers being assaulted as they tried to clear the meadow on July 4th, 1969, and incidents in which he was followed into his campsite and threatened by youth demanding food and money. Many newspapers, especially the *Fresno Bee*, the *Sacramento Bee*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Oakland Tribune* ran numerous letters to the editor airing the views of the public for months after the riot.

The *Berkeley Tribe* also published strong opinions on the event in its letter section, mostly denouncing the "Yosemite Terror" and "daily pig harassment," which "decreased the freak population in the Valley and temporarily stalled the struggle."¹² One letter to the *Tribe* called for a "10,000 freak army" to recapture the Valley from "those old guys with their fat trailers, fat wives and fat wallets."¹³

However, one of the most scathing indictments of Park Service actions in a widely read news source appeared more than a year after the riot in a long article in the *New York Times*. The author of the article, Robert A. Jones, criticized the Yosemite administration and rangers for not instituting changes which would ease tensions in the range war between middle America and the youth of Stoneman Meadow. In examining the events of July 4th, and the law

¹² *Berkeley Tribe*, July 17-24.

¹³ *Ibid.*

enforcement actions which followed, Jones concluded that the Park Service "has provided a paramilitary solution to what is a social problem."¹⁴

By the time of Jones' article, however, public uproar and bitter debate had prompted action. Members of Congress, the Department of the Interior and the Washington Office of the National Park Service were forced to respond to widely publicized calls for investigations and changes in the national parks. Although the Secretary of the Interior, Walter Hickel, announced to the press that he supported the use of force to control crowds of young people in the national parks, most politicians and administrators did not agree. In a letter to Dr. Fisher, the Director of the Park Service, George Hartzog, said, "Be assured that we are concerned about the allegations you have raised, and that we intend to pursue the matter thoroughly."¹⁵

The Administration and the Investigation

Immediately after the riot, the motivations and actions of Yosemite Superintendent Lawrence Hadley and Assistant Superintendent Russel Olson were questioned. To defend their position, both men issued statements on the riot, and made public comments on the situation which had led to violent confrontation. In addition to defending their past actions, the park administrators took steps to insure that a riot would not occur again. Most of these steps were aimed at controlling the influx of youth into the Park.

¹⁴ Robert A. Jones, "National Parks: A Report on the Range War at Generation Gap," *New York Times*, 25 July 1971, Section 10, 23.

¹⁵ George Hartzog, to Dr. John Fisher, 11 August 1970, Yosemite Research Library.

Later, the attitude of the administrators, as displayed by these statements and their steps to control the youth, would become suspect. Outside investigations, including the one sent from Washington D.C. by the Director of the National Park Service, significantly changed the direction of the Yosemite administration and the members of its staff. Ultimately, the changes suggested by the investigators reformed the division of law enforcement and other divisions of the Park Service as well. Many of the changes became nationwide policies.

On July 25th, 1970, a few weeks after the riot, Superintendent Lawrence Hadley answered a request from Senator Alan Cranston's office to explain what had created the riot. In his response, Hadley made his views on the Stoneman Meadow youth clear:

They pilfer from neighboring campsites, drift aimlessly about the Valley and bum food and money from park visitors. . . . The scene is at least annoying to neighboring campers if not disgusting as the action increases.

Those people are not motivated to come to Yosemite because it is a place of beauty whose special characteristics indeed are the reason it was made a national park. Rather the urge is based in the notion that here is a place where, as a group, they can get away with it. . . .¹⁶

Hadley's views, as articulated in his report to the Senator and as quoted by several news articles, expressed his belief that the long-haired type of park visitors did not wish to use the park's land in what he envisioned to be the proper manner. He stated over and over in various ways that the influx of hippies would spoil the park for other people.

¹⁶ Lawrence Hadley, to Senator Alan Cranston, 25 July 1970, 5, Yosemite Research Library.

The Assistant Superintendent, Russel Olson, also felt the need to explain and defend his actions because of the public outcry following the riot. In his statement he explained his views on the of youth in Yosemite:

All of us have come into contact and I suppose become used to college age youth and their antics. . . . Today's fad is social protest. . . . They pilfer from neighbors, drift aimlessly about places like Yosemite Valley, bum food, puff grass, drop pills, beat bongo drums, hurl Frisbees, drink quantities of wine. Such scenes are annoying to others and disgusting to many.¹⁷

Both Assistant Superintendent Olson and Superintendent Hadley sincerely wished that the youth and the social tension they brought with them would simply disappear from the national park scene so that traditional campers would not be bothered. Bitterness and embarrassment over the riot, and negative views of the hippies, guided the words and actions of the administrators in the later weeks of July, 1970. No attempt was made to welcome young people and ease tensions in the park.

Superintendent Hadley was moved to Washington D.C. to serve as the assistant director for Park Management within weeks of the riot. His replacement, Wayne B. Cone, was brought in from a Superintendency at Redwoods National Park.¹⁸ However, certain instructions given by Hadley regarding the gathering of youth in the park remained in force for months. One of the orders intended to keep the youth at bay mandated the inspection of cars at the entrance stations. Any car which did not pass a safety check was prohibited from entering the park. At the end of his report to Senator

¹⁷ Russel K. Olson, "A Park Administrator's View of Social Change," 4-5, Yosemite Research Library.

¹⁸ Yosemite Natural History Association, *Newsletter*, October 1970, 2-3.

Cranston, Superintendent Hadley explained his motivations in creating the safety checks:

Since the events of July 4th, the park has stepped up entrance station operations by maintaining close surveillance and controls on entering traffic to forestall a build-up within the park of the kind of population that precipitated the action of Stoneman Meadow. The point of first control is directed at entering vehicles having obvious mechanical defects in violation of the California Motor Vehicle Code as applied under Title 18, United States Code, Section 13. . . . These measures. . . have markedly diminished the members of unsupervised juveniles in the park whose presence and behavior has frustrated full public use and enjoyment of Yosemite.¹⁹

Many people were denied access to the park after these vehicle inspections, some because of loud mufflers, some because of cracked headlights or taillights, some for other minor mechanical problems. According to people who visited the park at the time, virtually all of those turned around at the entrance stations were perceived as hippies, young and often with long hair and driving Volkswagens.

Bob Roney remembers the experiences of some of his co-workers on a Park Service fire crew at the time:

We lived in Hodgdon Meadow, very near the entrance station. . . . I can remember then if you looked young the rangers would find, in fact they were told specifically to find, something wrong with the car and not let them into the park because of it. . . . And several people on the fire crew were not allowed to drive their vehicles back into the park. . . they had to park outside and hike back to their duty station.²⁰

Other stories of the same type of experience circulated in abundance. Many of the stories were published. In an article for *Natural History*, Jack Hope described having his car searched at the entrance station. He felt that the search occurred because the rangers did not like the looks of his passengers,

¹⁹ Hadley, to Senator Alan Cranston, 9.

²⁰ Roney, interview.

all young backpackers. Although the rangers checked every bulb in every light on the car, checked the identification of everyone in the vehicle, and asked to see their camping gear, Hope and his friends were not turned around at the gate in their brand new rental car. When Hope asked how cars were chosen for inspection, he was told that every third car was singled out. However, as Hope and his friends sat at the gate undergoing inspection, he claimed that six other cars paid the entrance fee and passed through the gate without hassle.²¹

Some law enforcement personnel who searched vehicles apparently tried to be more fair than others. Bill Krause, a high school teacher in 1970, and now a Yosemite resident, remembers the weeks immediately following the riot:

I recall. . . they had police and California State Police, I remember because I didn't know there was such a thing, in uniform, and they were going over every car that went through the entrance. Age didn't make any difference, they looked at every car. . . including mine, and I was at least forty something then. But probably the idea was that they would say if you didn't have this on your car, or if you had a broken headlight or something then you couldn't go into the park. And I think the idea, although I don't have any proof of that, was that they figured they would find a lot of old VW's with busted tailpipes and things and cut down the number of hippies in the place.²²

Word quickly got out that Yosemite was not welcoming young people. In a letter to the *Berkeley Tribe*, one person warned that Yosemite Valley was "an occupied zone," in which people and their vehicles were often searched. The letter concluded with a comment that, "Some sympathetic fire control aides. . . informed us the Yosemite terror will be in effect until after Labor Day."²³

²¹ Jack Hope, "Hassles in the Park," *Natural History*, May 1971, 20.

²² Bill Krause, interview by author, 7 February 1998, Yosemite, tape recording.

²³ *Berkeley Tribe*, 17-24 July, 5.

Even the *New York Times* published an account of the trials of one young couple trying to get a campsite in the park. According to the article, their car was inspected at the entrance station, and then they were asked for identification and had their van searched while parked at a meadow in the Valley. The *Times* article also gave other examples of how Yosemite was not culturally and economically inviting to certain parts of the population.²⁴ The author pointed out that all of the facilities, including hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, groceries stores and even Park Service programs, were geared toward a richer and older crowd. According to the author, the ranger talks in the campgrounds at night were "dull and so elementary that their purpose seems to be mainly the entertainment of small children, thus providing an hour of mass babysitting."²⁵

One young person summed up the situation this way:

Why can't we have a place in this park? Even a field? After all, they have all those hotels and swimming pools for the rich straights. But we can't afford them. And you know why we can't? Because we aren't greedy enough to go out and rape the environment and make a fat fifty thousand income like a good capitalist should. All that phony talk about protecting nature! If they're so worried, why don't they keep the cars out of here? Why pick on us?²⁶

This point was well received by numerous other people, including many Yosemite locals. Many people perceived that some of the young people did use the park in appropriate and appreciative ways. For example, the rangers had always tried to interest more visitors in experiencing the back country wilderness. This attempt to lure visitors away from the swimming pools and

²⁴ Jones, "National Parks," 23.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Quoted in Hope, "Hassles in the Park," 85.

bars in Yosemite Valley was an effort to allow visitors to connect with the natural environment and understand the reasons that the national parks existed. In this endeavor, they may have actually had more luck with the "hippies" than with the "straights." According to many informal estimates at the time, the increase in back country use in the late 1960s was largely due to the rise in the number of college age youth recreating in Yosemite. Stoneman Meadow was undoubtedly being ecologically damaged by litter, mass gatherings and inappropriate behavior. Some of the youth did steal from other campers and cause significant noise problems. However, the ways in which young people used the park did not always match the negative assumptions of the administration.

Yet the grievances of other people, some of whom had been vacationing with their families in Yosemite for decades, were also legitimate. Some of the complaints about the hippies stemmed not just from a social gap caused by differing views on the government, traditional values, or the war in Vietnam, but from a quiet desperation in the face of a loud and sometimes obnoxious new element in their beloved park. The complaints of these people arose from a very real sense of fear of the young people who roved about in groups through the middle of family campsites, often in the middle of the night. Begging and theft did occur, along with occasional incidents of drunken howling outside the tents of retired people.

While some park administrators tried to keep the hippie population down, and the concessionaires in the park continued to cater to an older, wealthier crowd, other events affected the management of Yosemite. After the riot, George Hartzog, the Director of the National Park Service, went to Yosemite to talk to people and attempt to understand the tensions. At one point in his visit

he dressed in old clothes and went incognito to join a hippie campfire conversation. He listened to a lively debate about whether the director would really care about their complaints. After leaving, he set up a meeting the next night at a large campfire circle, announcing that the Director of the Park Service would answer questions from the crowd. Despite some tension, Hartzog felt that the meeting went well. One particular question etched itself in his memory, bringing into sharp focus the debate over whom the parks belonged to and how they should be used. The question was posed by a long-haired young man, "Why would you prohibit us from sitting in the meadow mashing down the grass when you are cutting down 150-year old Douglas fir trees to expand a campground for recreational motor vehicles?"²⁷

As a result of Hartzog's visit to the park, and his subsequent meeting with Dr. Fisher, he initiated an investigation. The investigation was first headed by Captain Franklin A. Arthur, a riot control specialist. Captain Arthur then turned over the results of his investigation to Kenneth Tapman. Tapman and his committee traveled to Yosemite in August of 1970, and completed the investigation for Director Hartzog. With help committee members Captain Arthur, Lieutenant Paul Burgus, and Officer Karl Ore of the United States Park Police, and Bonnie Campbell, a sociologist, Tapman conducted interviews and studied the records of the riot and its background. The results of these efforts were published on August 28, 1970, along with a significant number of suggestions for implementing changes throughout the park system.

²⁷ George Hartzog, *Battling for the National Parks* (Mt. Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell Limited, 1988), 1-2.

In a section on general observations at the beginning of the report, the investigators noted that, "Visitor use in Yosemite National Park has increased markedly in recent years. This increase involves elements representative of various subcultures within our society; the young, the families, the elderly."²⁸ After describing the scene at Stoneman Meadow as a gathering place for youth, and acknowledging the drug use and noise, the report emphasized that, "The Park Service employees responsible for the administration of the park are confronted by what they considered an inappropriate use of the park by the young people."²⁹ The investigators also noted in their general observations that park personnel often classified people by hair style, instead of by behavior. No differentiation was made between "bikers," "suburban young people," "dope freaks" and "violent revolutionaries."³⁰ Also, the investigators found that "no attempt had been made to review park management practices with the view to helping the young people enjoy the park, while protecting park resources and the rights of other park visitors."³¹

In reviewing both these general observations and the events of the July 4th weekend, the investigators came to several conclusions. First and foremost, "This unnecessary confrontation resulted in several injuries; in excess of 150 arrests being made; in the safety and welfare of the visiting public being seriously endangered; and in tarnishing the Park Service's public image."³²

²⁸ Tapman, "Investigation Report," 1.

²⁹ Ibid., 2.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 3.

³² Ibid., 9.

The second conclusion was that the people in the meadow were not violent prior to July 4th, and that their only disturbing behavior just prior to the riot was shouting and setting off fireworks. Thus, "The action of the rangers galloping, swinging lariats into the people in the Meadow, followed by men on foot at a run waving batons and making forcible arrests, unnecessarily provoked violence by the young people in the Meadow."³³ The conclusion that this violence was preventable was the key point of the investigators' report.

The third conclusion stated that although the organization plan for personnel in the park had been circulated prior to the riot, those making the decisions on July 4th had not followed the correct procedures. Many examples were listed in support of this conclusion, including the fact that the Superintendent had taken no responsibility for dealing with the day to day problems that were building. Also, the Assistant Superintendent, who ran the daily operations, had failed to exercise field command or ask experienced law enforcement specialists on the staff to help design a plan to clear the meadow. Furthermore, the Chief Ranger had not taken a supervisory role in the field, but instead had chosen to be just another foot soldier. Also, he was later charged several times with the use of unnecessary force during the riot. These problems in the administration left a ranger with only two years experience in charge as the alleged field commander. His only guidance from above was a command to clear the meadow. Evidence for the lack of supervision and planning during the riot was also listed. These mistakes included the misdirection of the Sheriff's car, the galloping charge of the

³³ Ibid.

horses, and the use of undeputized concessionaire employees which exposed the government to liability. Other acknowledged problems included the decision to arrest sleeping people for out-of-bounds camping while failing to confront the more violent rioters at the Stoneman Bridge roadblock. Also, inadequate arrest and booking procedures were described.

After outlining these conclusions, the investigators put forth seven recommendations for the whole Park Service, and three recommendations specific to Yosemite. The recommendations for Yosemite included designating an isolated location as a camping area for young people where they would not disturb others. This campground would have no 10 p.m. quiet hour regulation, and there would be evening events designed for youthful campers. Another recommendation suggested that certain personnel be investigated for disciplinary action, including the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent and Chief Ranger. The third recommendation specific to Yosemite requested an immediate review of the law enforcement practices in the park. This review would focus on search and seizure procedures during arrests, the especially strict enforcement of certain regulations, booking procedures, and the handling of property of arrested persons.

Many of the recommendations regarding the management of all of the parks were eventually implemented. The first recommendation was to review the existing law enforcement practices in all National Park Service areas. The areas to be examined would involve training practices, the type of personnel used in incidents, the legal guidelines followed, the equipment used and the type of law enforcement problems experienced in various parks and monuments. The second recommendation provided for an expanded and standardized training program for all Park Service law enforcement

personnel. The third recommendation suggested that law enforcement personnel should be distinguished from other personnel who did not have the same responsibilities, and that decisions involving law enforcement field operations should be the responsibility of the superintendent of each park. The fourth recommendation requested a survey of all park areas to determine the necessary manpower needs, seasonal and permanent. The fifth nationwide recommendation asked for a review of the public use of the parks. This recommended creating campground specifically for youth when necessary, separated from the areas of other park visitors. The sixth recommendation requested that park regulations be reviewed with the concept that parks are for people, a controversial statement. The seventh recommendation was that a liaison with representatives at the regional or Washington office should be mandatory with respect to law enforcement problems.³⁴ In the end, not all of the recommendations were completely carried out. But the impact of this report was significant enough to force some nationwide changes in the Park Service and its stewardship of the parks.

About a year after the investigation report was circulated, changes in Yosemite began to accelerate. As the *New York Times* reported to its readers, "A new management team approach will be used to administer the park and longhaired youths will be accommodated rather than harassed."³⁵ The *Times* article also concluded that the approach "may be inaugurated in other national parks where the impact of visitors is also great."³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., 11-12.

³⁵ Phillip Fradkin, "Personnel Shifted to Change Image of Yosemite Park," *New York Times*, 28 July 1971.

³⁶ Ibid.

On August 8th, 1971, Lynn H. Thompson replaced Wayne Cone as Superintendent of Yosemite after Cone's short time at the helm. Five of Cone's senior staff members were also shifted, and Thompson's staff was augmented with four new and more youth-oriented employees. Thompson and his staff began immediately to implement many of the suggestions of the investigators. The most obvious changes of the new administration occurred in law enforcement training and practices, and in the focus of the interpretation division. Yosemite's official policies began to reach out to the youth and provide activities and experiences for them as well—away from the traditional campers of middle America.

Changes in Law Enforcement

In 1966, Howard Baker, Acting Assistant Regional Director of Operations for the Western Region of the National Park Service sent a memorandum to the superintendents of twenty seven parks on the subject of law enforcement. The first paragraph of the memo presented the basics of the Park Service approach to law enforcement. It stated that, "The protection of people from fear and bodily harm, loss of property and inconvenience, as well as the protection of park values is the end objective of our law enforcement efforts."³⁷ Today, the basic principles of law enforcement remain the same, but the methods are different.

In 1966, when the memo was issued, methods of law enforcement varied from park to park, and they were loosely regulated. In any park, however, all

³⁷ Howard Baker, "Statements on Law Enforcement," Memorandum, Western Regional Office, 15 March 1966, Yosemite Research Library.

federal employees were technically responsible for enforcing park regulations. Although some rangers were specifically hired to enforce the law, there were no requirements such as a federal commission or special certifications. These rangers possessed firearms, but they did not usually wear them on their person. Baker's memo indicates an idealistic view of law enforcement which may have been more suited to a time of minimal visitation in the parks. The memo pointed out that, "People are in a very strange environment when they are with us--especially in the mountain and desert areas, and our regulations are in the overall generally more restrictive than elsewhere."³⁸ For these reasons, the memo recommended that rangers "should use correction as an educational vehicle, if at all possible, rather than invoke the legal process."³⁹ The memo did not provide practical methods to accomplish this end, however, and there were few training opportunities available for specific Park Service law enforcement activities. Each park and each superintendent had great freedom in deciding how to practice law enforcement.

After the riot in Yosemite, administrators in the Western Region and in Washington D.C. debated the issues raised by the riot and the recommendations of the investigation. Initial reactions in policy and practice were localized and sometimes contradictory. Yosemite and other parks lurched from one extreme to the other with regard to firearms policies, training practices and other law enforcement concerns. Eventually, however, the recommendations of the investigators did cause significant and lasting changes.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

The most important reforms occurred with the institution of standardized training practices, commission requirements and standardized enforcement policies. These changes were consolidated and published in "NPS-9," a document issued to all law enforcement personnel which outlines basic policies and practices. The creation of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) further cemented the new system of standardized law enforcement in the parks. Other changes included firearms regulations for the rangers, and the development of trained horse patrols in several parks. All of these changes occurred in the 1970s. The intense scrutiny of law enforcement practices after the riot may not have directly caused all of these changes, but it certainly was a catalyst for reform.

One way in which the political atmosphere following the riot forced change was in the immediate concern of top Park Service officials over the beating that the "ranger image" had taken in the media as a result of the riot and the investigations. As one author of a text on law enforcement in the parks put it:

Currently, there appears to be two prevalent public images associated with park rangers. The traditional, positive "Smokey Bear" image is far the most widely held. The other, seemingly held by a vociferous minority of primarily youthful visitors, looks upon the ranger as a "pine pig" who's [*sic*] primary task is to "hassle" them and deny their rights to do "their things" within the park.⁴⁰

The *Fresno Bee* reflected on the changing image of the ranger in an article titled "Riot Echo: Smokey Dons His Police Helmet, Grabs Weapon." The *Los Angeles Times* and other newspapers and magazines also ran with this idea. In a typical article of this type, Peter Barnes wrote in the *New Republic* that "the primary burden of stepped-up law enforcement falls upon the Park Rangers,

⁴⁰ J. William Shiner, *Park Ranger Handbook*, revised edition (State College, PA: Venture Publishing, 1986), I-5.

whose well-known uniform, alas, has come to symbolize not only the helpful naturalist, but the punitive power of the state."⁴¹ Certain administrators in the Department of the Interior and the Park Service were quite sensitive to stories which reflected a heavy-handed and negative image of the ranger. This concern translated into action and reform.

At the same time, some of the rangers in Yosemite felt that the media had not presented a balanced view of the events at Stoneman Meadow. Chief Ranger Richard Marks spoke to author Edward Abbey about the riot during one of Abbey's trips to Yosemite. According to Abbey, Marks felt that the media had been unfair in televising the "battle" at Stoneman Meadow but not the events that preceded it.⁴² The television and print coverage did cause a drop in attendance to the park immediately after the riot.⁴³ Some apparently stayed away because Yosemite was portrayed as a police state; others apparently stayed away because, on the news, the park seemed to be infested with hippies.

Embarrassment over media exposure and public concern was an important catalyst for change in the law enforcement division. Preventing a recurrence of the riot prompted new training and preparedness by the law enforcement staff. Arrest procedures, crowd control and fair methods of enforcement were emphasized. Once the training began, the media angle changed. Articles with titles such as "National Park Service Solves Ticklish Law Enforcement

⁴¹ Pete Barnes, "Summer in the Parks," *The New Republic*, 21 & 28 August 1971, 12.

⁴² Edward Abbey, *The Journey Home* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977), 139-40.

⁴³ *Los Angeles Times*, 7 July 1970.

Problem,"⁴⁴ reported a significant increase in on-the-job training and a "friendly but firm approach," and became a common theme in newspapers as training was implemented.

Concerns about the safety of the rangers and the image of the rangers also played into the long debate about firearms regulations which followed. However, initial reactions both in Yosemite and at a national level were abrupt, sometimes defensive, and not always well thought out. Some administrators apparently expected hordes of hippies to swarm other parks. At the end of 1970, several regional offices shipped boxes of guns to individual parks to be issued to rangers.⁴⁵

In the memories of many people, the visible arming of rangers is firmly established as an immediate repercussion of the riot. However, the riot was only one causal factor. In fact, the time-frame of the changes in firearm policies for law enforcement officers does not bear out a simple cause and effect equation between the riot and the arming of the rangers. Nevertheless, it is clear that the riot provided one link in the series of events which led to the carrying of guns.

Although the sheriffs and policemen had firearms on their belts during the riot, there is no record of any of the rangers being visibly armed or firing shots. Directly after the riot rangers were permitted to wear firearms by order of Superintendent Hadley. However, when Superintendent Thompson arrived in 1971, he wanted a low key approach and issued strict controls on the

⁴⁴ *Sacramento Bee*, 11 August 1973.

⁴⁵ Roney, interview.

carrying of firearms by rangers.⁴⁶ Kerry Maxwell, who began working as a law enforcement officer in 1971, remembers the confusion and frustration regarding weapons regulations after the riot:

On a number of occasions, they would give us our weapons and then take them away from us again. . . . When I went to Lake Mead, they gave them to us and took them back again. . . they were worried about the high profile. The whole concern through this whole era was the ranger image. And at times it got to be that they were more concerned with the image than the safety of the person.⁴⁷

The confusion over firearm regulation was echoed by many law enforcement rangers in Yosemite during Thompson's tenure. Jim Galloway, a law enforcement ranger in 1971, commented at the time that, "Taking away our weapons hurts law enforcement--rangers are hesitant to make car stops or to visit campgrounds at night."⁴⁸ However, all of the policies were later standardized in NPS-9, and all law enforcement rangers now wear firearms. As Kerry Maxwell said:

It was the Park Police that pioneered the law enforcement for the park rangers in Washington. They did a lot of lobbying for us and they got our weapons back and they got our policies standardized, like NPS-9 so we could carry our weapons and it is illegal for a superintendent now to tell us we can't wear them.⁴⁹

NPS-9, with the approval of Congress, standardized many such regulations, and cleared up some of the confusion surrounding law enforcement in the early 1970s.

⁴⁶ Lynn Thompson, quoted in Loretta DeLozier, "Yosemite Finds a Way: Solving People Problems in Parks," *NPS Newsletter*, 18 October 1971, 2.

⁴⁷ Maxwell, interview.

⁴⁸ Jim Galloway, quote in DeLozier, "Yosemite Finds a Way," 4.

⁴⁹ Maxwell, interview.

NPS-9 is now on its third release, dated 1989. The second release was in 1984, and the first was in 1976 after Congressional approval following several years of compilation and revision. The document begins by outlining the direction of law enforcement and the purpose of NPS-9:

The general authority which the National Park Service now has to protect persons and property within the National Park System is not sufficiently clear to allow for effective law enforcement in the National Park System. . . . In order to eliminate possible uncertainties relating to law enforcement activities in the National Park System, all existing law enforcement authorities will be replaced with a clear mandate authorizing designated employees performing law enforcement functions within the system to bear firearms; enforce all Federal laws including serious criminal violations as well as misdemeanors applying specifically to the parks; execute process; and investigate offenses.⁵⁰

The document, quoting the instructions of Congress, then outlines the qualifications necessary for the small number of individuals within the Park Service who would have the responsibility for law enforcement as their exclusive duty. A chain of command for decision-making about law enforcement activities is also summarized. This chain of command begins with the Secretary of the Interior, then the regional directors, the superintendents and the rangers. The mandate clearly states that deviation from the process laid out in NPS-9 is authorized only in cases where a region or park requires a specific supplemental policy.⁵¹ This statement effectively ended the era of localized and independent power for the superintendents of the parks.

With the creation of NPS-9 and FLETC, where many Park Service rangers are now trained, the standards of law enforcement training solidified. The Stoneman Meadow Riot influenced this training decades later. Even today,

⁵⁰ National Park Service, "NPS-9," release number three, October 1989, 1.

⁵¹ Ibid.

rangers who attend FLETC to gain their commission often view a videotape of the Stoneman Meadow incident during training on crowd control. Ranger Mike Brindeiro remembers seeing the video in 1986 with many rangers who were being trained for various parks across the country.⁵² Ranger Dick Ewart remembers seeing the video in 1979. He also remembers that "they admitted the mistake. . . and that was in law enforcement training, when they admitted 'yeah, we didn't do it right.'"⁵³

With the implementation of training and commission requirements for law enforcement personnel, another change occurred. Divisions and jobs in the Park Service became more specialized as other rangers were no longer qualified to perform certain law enforcement functions. In 1974, two years before NPS-9 was issued, a Park Service interpreter's training handbook noted these changes in progress in a section on law enforcement guidelines:

The law states that all employees are charged with enforcement of the applicable laws within Park Service areas. However this is currently being Congressionally changed to reflect the real fears and desires of both the Federal Government and the public to have properly trained personnel providing this law enforcement function.⁵⁴

As of 1976, with the first printing of NPS-9, any employee who lacked law enforcement training and a federal commission was no longer held responsible for enforcing laws in the parks.

Aside from standardizing training in crowd control and other law enforcement techniques, another change in several parks was the creation of specialized horse patrols for crowd control. In Yosemite, this occurred

⁵² Mike Brindeiro, interview by author, 3 February 1998, tape recording.

⁵³ Dick Ewart, interview by author, 7 February 1998, tape recording.

⁵⁴ National Park Service, *Interpreter's Handbook*, 1974.

immediately following the Stoneman Meadow Riot. The Yosemite rangers and administrators, in a meeting on July 7, 1970, suggested methods to improve crowd control, enforce laws, and prevent a riot from recurring. Some of the staff noted that although the horses had been kept admirably under control in a violent situation, there were a few problems with the horse charge of July 4th. During the meeting it was pointed out that, "The throwing of bottles and rocks had made the horses jumpy, so the decision was made to move fast. . . there was a lack of coordination between the foot and horse patrols."⁵⁵ Many agreed that the problems with the operation were due to lack of training and communication. Thus, a horse patrol was created in Yosemite to deal with crowd control. In July and August of 1970, under the direction of U.S. Park Police, ten men and horses began training in Yosemite Valley. Dennis Ayres of the U.S. Park Police was in charge of the program in the summer of 1970, and he pointed to the advantages of a horse patrol, saying, "A horse can move in blocked traffic, a horseman can see much better than a foot patrol man. . . and everybody likes a guy on a horse."⁵⁶

By 1972, the Park Police and their trained horses no longer returned to the park to assist the rangers. In Yosemite Valley, rangers with riding experience and training from the Park Police continued organizing and preparing the horse patrol. Using volunteers, they taught the horses how to push a crowd on the ground, how to side step, and how to remain calm. Sometimes they took black plastic and sacked them, making noise and shouting to teach them to

⁵⁵ Staff Meeting Minutes, 7 July 1970, 2.

⁵⁶ Denis Ayres, quoted in Alan Bermer, "Horse Patrol Trains to Control Unruly Crowds," *Fresno Bee*, 26 August 1970, 2-H.

remain sedate and obedient when faced with disorderly crowds.⁵⁷ The horse patrol became a useful tool as rangers patrolled the Valley speaking to visitors. As several rangers noted, cases of intentional abuse toward police on horseback were very low compared to cases of objects or shouts being hurled at police cars.⁵⁸

Although standardized training practices, commission requirements and organization of the horse patrol took years to implement, some of these new training and preparedness factors were in place in Yosemite by Labor Day of 1970. An operational plan for the park was prepared which included a horse patrol, extra staffing at the entrance stations for car inspections, a specific checklist for the field transport of prisoners, a detailed list of arrest procedures, a chain of command chart, and schedules of twenty-four hour patrols by U.S. Marshals, Border Patrol Agents and rangers. Thirty-eight extra men were brought in for the entire weekend, including fourteen U.S. Marshals. Twelve experienced Park Police on horseback were also present, patrolling the campgrounds and speaking to the public from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.⁵⁹ The level of preparedness was greatly improved compared to the July 4th holiday.

During the Labor Day weekend, auto inspections at the gate were in effect, but many youths entered the park. Dozens of members of the media walked through the Valley with cameras and notebooks and watched as young people

⁵⁷ Maxwell, interview.

⁵⁸ Ayres, "Horse Patrol," 2-H.

⁵⁹ National Park Service, Yosemite Administration, "Operational Plan: Labor Day Holiday Period, 1970," third draft, 17 August 1970, 7.

flashed peace signs and mounted police moved through the Valley. But nothing happened. Three days passed without a major incident. About forty thousand people visited the park over Labor Day weekend, 1970, approximately the same number as on the July 4th holiday weekend, and despite continuing resentment on both sides, no violence occurred.⁶⁰

While considering the state of law enforcement at the time of the riot and today, Ranger Kerry Maxwell gave an opinion, "Had we had the proper training at the time, and had the proper funding and proper equipment, I don't think the riot would have occurred. . . . We are generally heading in a forward direction, slowly but surely."⁶¹ Other law enforcement rangers have opinions on the impact of the riot as well. As one retired ranger, Ron Mackie, said, "That incident changed the ranger profession forever."⁶²

Changes in Interpretation

With the changes in administration and the initial upheaval in the regulations governing the law enforcement division, other changes were implemented as well. After the riot, a conscious decision was made at the national level. Funding, staffing and training became available for interpretive programs which would appeal to young people and teach them something about the national park experience. A strong effort was made to reach out to the youth instead of shutting them out.

⁶⁰ Hope, "Hassles in the Park," 28.

⁶¹ Maxwell, interview.

⁶² Ron Mackie, interview by author, 6 March 1998, Yosemite.

The function of the interpretive division, both before and after the riot, was to support "the mission of the National Park Service by communicating with visitors through a variety of media an awareness and integrated understanding of Park significance, philosophy, and resource values."⁶³ Interpreters operated visitor centers, presented walks, talks and evening programs, managed museum collections and supervised environmental education programs. After the riot, the types of programs offered and the methods of communication with visitors were re-evaluated. Although traditional programs remained in place, new ones were added to accommodate non-traditional audiences. In Yosemite, these changes incorporated the recommendations of the investigation, and in some cases went even further in attempting to connect with the youth.

In the summer of 1971, the programs of the interpretation division in Yosemite increased in number and variety. At the request of Director Hartzog, twenty five new interpreters were brought in for the season, some of whom were paid and some of whom volunteered.⁶⁴ In addition to traditional evening campfire programs and daily nature walks, these interpreters put on programs designed to appeal to college aged people visiting the park. Among these special offerings were evening presentations with rock music and light shows, raft float trips down the river, poetry and music sessions with the rangers, scenic bike rides, rock climbing workshops, backpacking talks, arts and crafts demonstrations, and programs at the Indian Cultural Center in

⁶³ National Park Service, "Role and Function Statement: Division of Interpretation," *Interpreter's Handbook*, 1974.

⁶⁴ Michael Frome, *Regreening the National Parks* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1992), 87.

which Miwok dances, songs, games and crafts were taught. There were new programs offered for other age groups as well, including ecology walks for children. Another change in the late summer of 1971 was the creation of Yellow Pines campground, which catered to the youthful crowd.

The point of these new programs was to create a connection between the young crowd and the national park experience, to lure people away from the Stoneman Meadow party scene and introduce them to a different park experience. The evening shows are a prime example of how this was done. In the summer of 1971, Camp 14 was closed to rebuild the sites and roadways. Since there were no family campers left there to disturb, the Camp 14 amphitheater was used nightly for the first multiple slide projector and rock music shows. Dean Shenk recalls his first experience with the evening shows that summer:

I was heading over [to Camp 14] with a couple of guys I had just fallen in with, and we were tripping over picnic tables, and we realized the camp was abandoned. But we heard Joni Mitchell singing off in the distance, singing "Pave paradise and put up parking lots," and there was a screen full of mirror images of suburbia, roads, houses. . . and then Frank Zappa songs and Cat Stevens. . . and then after the slide show they invited us up around the campfire to rap. And Bob Fry was there and he talked about yoga. . . he was a traditional park ranger type, but here he was talking about yoga and wilderness ethics. . . .⁶⁵

Bob Roney, a firefighter that summer, also came down to the Valley to see one of the shows. He recalls that, "There was a real nice slide show with music from current rock and roll, beautiful pictures of Yosemite. . . . Afterwards, everybody got around the campfire and rapped with the ranger. . . about all sorts of religious stuff and Yosemite stuff."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Shenk, interview.

⁶⁶ Roney, interview.

The group of rangers and volunteers who ran the programs in 1971 included David Vassar, the film student who had taped the riot, and Bob Fry, a veteran seasonal naturalist and interpreter. When Bob Fry looks back on the programs and the point that the interpreters were trying to get across with them, he recalls that they were partly meant to entertain and partly meant to show people nature. He especially enjoyed the campfire discussions with the young people after the light shows, saying, "They loved to hang out. . . and there were always guitars around. . . there was a lot of talent here."⁶⁷

Vassar was hired to help with the youth programs after joining a discussion around a campfire in 1970. Director Hartzog happened to be at the same campfire, and was impressed by some of the ideas presented by Vassar and his friends. Director Hartzog, according the story, offered Vassar a job that night.⁶⁸ At the evening programs, Vassar tried many things to spark discussion and interest among the youth. He frequently showed his footage of the riot, and often showed short works by friends of his who were student filmmakers trying to break into the business. Often these short films were politically and religiously controversial.⁶⁹ The intent was to spark discussion both about current social problems and views of nature.

Another means of accommodating the youth, while also separating them from traditional campers, was the creation of Yellow Pines campground in Yosemite Valley. Yellow Pines opened on Labor Day of 1971, and many youths helped to plan and build it. Although open to everyone, its primitive facilities

⁶⁷ Bob Fry, interview by author, 3 February 1998, tape recording.

⁶⁸ Shenk, interview.

⁶⁹ Fry, interview.

appealed to those who lacked the cash for regular camping fees. Located over a mile from other campgrounds, it cost only twenty-five cents per night when it opened. It did not have the same quiet hours as other campgrounds and the walk-in sites held more people than a regular campsite.⁷⁰

By the next summer, Yellow Pines had become very popular with the youth as word of mouth brought many to the site. Dean Shenk recalls the first summers at Yellow Pine, "Word of mouth spread fast. . . it was a lot cheaper. . . and they had a little policy: pick up a bag of trash and stay free for a night. . . . And the whole concept was--separate them. . . . The whole Yellow Pine thing was to remove them and get the noisy teenagers away from Mom and Pop America."⁷¹

At some point the name of Yellow Pine was changed to Muir Tree, although it was called by both names for several years. One of the reasons for the name change might have been the popular catchphrase remembered by many who were there, "Smoke a little dope, drink a little wine, let's go down to Yellow Pine!"⁷²

During the summer of 1972, several changes occurred in the "youth program." Camp 14 was reopened to the public and traditional campfire programs were reinstated there. The slide shows were moved to a secluded amphitheater at Happy Isles instead, so that the rock music would not cause friction with other campers. That same summer Bob Roney joined the interpretive staff as a ranger, and Dean Shenk joined as a paid volunteer.

⁷⁰ DeLozier, "Yosemite Finds a Way," 2.

⁷¹ Shenk, interview.

⁷² See Roney, interview; Shenk, interview.

Some of the programs they remember are light shows at Happy Isles with up to four hundred people in attendance, art sketch walks, poetry sessions, campfire conversations and music sessions. Bob Roney explains the programs and goals when he joined the staff:

We did it out at Happy Isles, specifically chosen because it was away from all other campgrounds to segregate the young people from the family groups. And the idea was to provide the appearance of a party and gathering for the young people to come to, and to deliver to some degree on that promise while at the same time using it as a forum to ultimately interpret the meaning of the national park—to get people more involved in protecting it, in taking more responsibility for the park than just using it as a place to come and escape authority and party. That was the true desire for it.

We did a lot of things that were party-like. We played rock and roll music on a quadraphonic sound system, we had a huge screen with six or eight slide projectors, two movie projectors. . . . It would start out with Pink Floyd. . . pictures of Yosemite. . . and we had volunteers who were musicians who would play guitar and sing. . . . Some evenings we took people on moonlight walks up to Vernal Falls with one hundred people holding hands in the dark, no flashlights, walking up the mist trail. Just grooving, quote grooving, on nature.⁷³

The summer of 1972 also saw the start of demonstrations of activities like mountain rescue techniques, climbing basics and how to back country camp with minimal impact. A popular expanded Miwok Indian exhibit, staffed largely by Indian employees portraying native life in Yosemite Valley during the 1870s-1880s, also received more funding and staff. The bicycle ecology tours around a few quiet Valley roads which had been recently closed to cars were well-attended. The three hour float trips down the Merced, which stopped at various places to discuss river ecology, were also popular for participants in swimsuits and sneakers.⁷⁴

⁷³ Roney, interview.

⁷⁴ Yosemite Natural History Association, *Newsletter*, December 1971, 1-2.

However, during this time of growth in interpretation, there was some friction between law enforcement officers and some of the interpreters and the youth. This tension was often due to marijuana use during the programs at Happy Isles and in Yellow Pine. On orders from Superintendent Thompson law enforcement at Happy Isles during evening programs was relaxed. The level of law enforcement during the slide shows was exemplified by an interpretive ranger walking around the crowd shooting out joints with a squirt gun. This type of policy was unpopular among some of the officers who questioned the value of rock music by Pink Floyd as a communication tool in a national park. Drug use and fights also occurred in Yellow Pines, and the patrol rangers sent in to respond were often not armed because of the pendulum swing of the firearms policies. The law enforcement rangers and interpreters who patrolled the campground, and those who were assigned to stay in one of the permanent tents overnight, needed a psychologically thoughtful approach. Most agree that it was challenging.

Other people also questioned whether the new focus in the interpretation division was beneficial. One middle aged church leader told a reporter that "this ecology stuff is a bunch of garbage," and some youthful backpackers told the same writer, "It's too organized for us."⁷⁵ A superintendent of another park called the focus on youth "discrimination." But Ranger Bob Fry said at the time that, "We should tolerate variety in people. . . . Every visitor should feel as much a part of the park as the rocks and trees."⁷⁶ And Ansel Adams, the photographer who at the time ran a studio in Yosemite Valley, said in 1971,

⁷⁵ Quoted in DeLozier, "Yosemite Finds a Way," 4.

⁷⁶ Bob Fry, quoted in DeLozier, "Yosemite Finds a Way," 4.

"The feeling I get this year is a fine appreciation for the place. . . . I've never seen so many backpackers. . . really its becoming a smooth, well-balanced situation."⁷⁷

One other point of view is presented by author Stanford DeMars. In his opinion, the 1970s version of interpretation missed some basic points in its zeal to communicate the story of the national parks to everyone. He said:

Perhaps more subtle than the changes in visitor activities were the shifts that occurred in interpretation efforts. Prior to the wilderness era the principal intent of park naturalists was to facilitate visitors' understanding and enjoyment of nature by introducing them to a friendly world of plants, animals and natural processes. . . . All this changed during the 1960s and 1970s. . . one of the underlying philosophies of the wilderness movement was the contention that man was an alien to wilderness. . . . Park Service naturalists were gradually indoctrinated in the "new" ecology and with the proselytizing zeal characteristic of the time set out to convert the traveling public to their way of thinking. . . . The change in philosophy was not without its problems. . . [including] the constant inference that human interaction with the natural world is inevitably detrimental.⁷⁸

DeMars traced this new sort of condescension toward visitors, who must be taught that their presence in the wilderness might be a threat, to a change in beliefs among interpreters. The new belief system, he argued, revolved around the idea that the preservation of wilderness areas like Yosemite held the key to the future well-being of the planet. DeMars felt that this is a simplistic solution. Thus, he resented certain tactics employed by the new wave of interpreters. One example of what he considered to be a disturbing tactic was the attempt to remove visitors from all contact with wildlife ("Dangerous animals! Do not approach!"). However, he did conclude that most

⁷⁷ Ansel Adams, quoted in DeLozier, "Yosemite Finds a Way," 4.

⁷⁸ DeMars, *The Tourist in Yosemite*, 147.

of the new style interpretive talks, whatever their biases, were well-presented.

The aftereffects of the riot on the division of interpretation in Yosemite and other parks were far-reaching. The slide programs at Happy Isles are no longer performed, Yellow Pines campground is now closed, the "youth program" no longer exists as such. However, the riot and its repercussions did revitalize interpretation. As Dean Shenk now reflects, "It made us really reassess. . . how we reach out to non-traditional users and various races and economic levels."⁷⁹ In a definite staffed and financed approach with orders from Washington, innovative programs and a re-evaluation of public needs occurred after the riot. Bob Roney concurs, noting that the changes may have been due even without the riot, but that, "After the task force from Washington D.C. arrived. . . there was a blossoming of the diversity of programs. . . . This incident in Yosemite had echoes throughout the National Park Service."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Shenk, interview.

⁸⁰ Roney, interview.

CHAPTER IV

THE PARK SERVICE PARADOX

Public Enjoyment Vs. Preservation

The National Park Service began with an oxymoron of a mandate. The idea of providing for both public use and preservation in national parks has undergone sometimes controversial shifts over time as people reconsider the nature of preservation. As perceptions and cultural definitions change, policies of the stewards of the parks must change accordingly to protect different types of use while still protecting the land.

There are as many different perceptions of what happened on July 4th, 1970, as there are witnesses to the riot and opinionated members of the public. What matters is not so much an exact recounting of the riot itself, but the legacy of the Stoneman Meadow conflict. It is important to examine the riot for two reasons. First, the incident reflected the times, illustrating both the social tensions of the summer of 1970 and the debate over what constitutes appropriate use in national parks. Second, aftereffects of the riot such as the investigation's recommendations changed policy and to some extent the management direction of the National Park Service.

It is interesting to note the connections between some of the people at Stoneman Meadow and later Park Service policies in Yosemite. One of the most vocalized complaints of the generation of youth in 1970 was the presence of a corporation-dominated power structure which disregarded the care of the

environment. Another common complaint was the dependence on automobiles and paved roads by the older generation (although many in the older generation felt the same way, and many in the younger generation were very attached to their motorcycles and cars). Yet the National Park Service itself was created to furnish the public with a form of recreation that relied not on economic exploitation and paved roads, but on wildlife, rocks, trees, flowers and water. Despite the conflicts between the two groups, there was and is a basis for an understanding.

Scholars, authors, rangers and visitors have many different versions of the impact and significance of the summer of 1970 on Park Service policy and the future of the parks. As Alfred Runte summarized his view on the riot:

There were few incidents more ugly and few more prophetic. Never before had attention been so diverted from the historical role of national parks as sanctuaries of nature. Traditionally, the Park Service had balanced that mandate with encouraging visitation. Here was troubling proof that crowds could be mean and not just well-meaning. . . . Granted, the Park Service had done nothing to encourage rioters, but it had encouraged crowds.¹

Other environmentalists and authors agreed that the riot highlighted the crowded situation in Yosemite Valley and other parks. Edward Abbey, reflecting on the riot and public use of Yosemite, had the following to say in 1971:

The Park Service believes that Yosemite is not the proper location for youth festivals, organized or disorganized. No doubt true. . . . But I can think of other things that Yosemite Valley is not the proper place for. It is not the proper place for paved roads and motor traffic in any form. It is not the proper place for gas stations, supermarkets, bars, curio shops, barbershops, a hospital, a lodge, a hotel, a convention center, and a small city of permanent and transient residents. Above all Yosemite Valley is not

¹ Alfred Runte, *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 202.

a proper place for a jail, for administrators, for police wearing park ranger uniforms.

What should Yosemite Valley be? It should be what it once was: the kind of place where a person would know himself lucky to make one pilgrimage there in his lifetime. A holy place.

*Keep it like it was.*²

Many others echo the same sentiments, but the mandate still stands. As expressed in the 1978 version of Yosemite's General Management Plan, the dual directives for the park were to, "Preserve the unique and spectacular glaciated topography and ecologic communities of one of the world's scenic wonders; and Enable the public to enjoy Yosemite Valley under conditions which will afford visitors a quality experience."³

In the same year that Yosemite's master plan was first drafted, President Richard Nixon visited Yellowstone National Park. He noted that, "The growing popularity of our parks has created a number of serious new problems. . . traffic congestion, and crowded campsites. . . natural systems have been overburdened and damaged by the presence of too many people."⁴ Solving such a problem, however, involves some painful choices between purists and recreationists. Some say that new objectives should replace accessibility, objectives such as getting people out of their cars and closer to nature. Others advocate building more roads to make more areas easily accessible and thus spread out the crowds. Others propose different solutions. As author William Everhart said in 1972, "In future years, restrictions of the number of people

² Abbey, *The Journey Home*, 144-45.

³ United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "Master Plan: Yosemite National Park, California," preliminary working draft, July 1971.

⁴ Richard Nixon, quoted in Everhart, *The National Park Service*, 226.

who will be able to enter the parks is inevitable, and the determination of how this can be done equitably presents one of the most crucial decisions that the Park Service has faced in its history."⁵ These debates on autos in the parks, and on how many people can fit in one park on any given weekend, raise more questions about "appropriate use." In examining the damaging and inappropriate use of Stoneman Meadow in 1970, and the Park Service's inappropriate reaction to it, this ever-changing definition continues to be a focus of compromise and change.

Obviously change is part of the national park concept, from geologic change, to the regeneration of a forest after a fire, to the activities of the people visiting the parks. The definitions of public use and appropriate use have evolved and will continue to shift in the future. But some facts are certain. National parks will continue to draw crowds, and changes in the use of public land will continue.

The Debate Continues

In 1997 and 1998, an important new plan is being developed with regard to Yosemite Valley. A portion of the General Management Plan for the park, first presented to the public in 1978, the Valley Implementation Plan will probably cause significant changes in the activities of people in Yosemite Valley. Although still open for public comment and debate, it seems probable that portions of the plan will be implemented in the next couple of years. Some alternatives in the Valley Implementation Plan include severe restrictions on autos entering Yosemite Valley, an extended free shuttle bus system, the

⁵ Everhart, *The National Park Service*, 203.

construction of parking lots in the west end of the Valley, a change in the number of campsites, and the removal of many Park Service and concessionaire buildings.⁶

Workshops and meetings have been held throughout California to include the public in decision-making processes regarding the national parks. Public comment on the Valley Implementation Plan has also been solicited through newspaper articles, pamphlets and letters. As of February 23, 1998, more than four thousand sets of comments on the Valley Implementation Plan have been gathered.⁷ The hope is that people from all segments of the public will have a say by choosing from several alternative plans regarding the future of Yosemite Valley.

The crowding that may have helped cause the riot and which has been a concern of writers and travelers from Frederick Law Olmstead to Alfred Runte and Edward Abbey continues to be a point of contention. The question of public access and the public's right to drive up to the most scenic places in the parks is a hotly debated topic. All sides of the question are discussed in articles and books, as well as the meetings regarding the Valley Implementation Plan.

Throughout all the debate and change, however, people will continue to visit the parks. The best reasons that the parks were set aside will still exist. The parks will help to replenish the human spirit and provoke environmental awareness as people develop a sense of place and connection. As one official

⁶ United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "Draft Yosemite Valley Implementation Plan: Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement," 1997.

⁷ Stanley Albright, Superintendent of Yosemite, open letter to the public, 23 February 1998.

said on the Monday morning after the Stoneman Meadow Riot, "I looked out this morning and Half Dome had not moved an inch."⁸

⁸ quoted in "Attendance at Yosemite Park Drops After Youth Rampage," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 July 1970.

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