

Eastern Illinois University

**The Keep**

---

Undergraduate Honors Theses

Honors College

---

2019

## **The Forbidden Water: Politics, Media, and Public Opinion in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy**

Gabriel Mansfield

Follow this and additional works at: [https://thekeep.eiu.edu/honors\\_theses](https://thekeep.eiu.edu/honors_theses)



Part of the [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---



## Chapter 1: Literature Review

---

In his collection of works about conservation entitled *The American Environment*, Roderick Nash makes an interesting observation. Nash finds that there are two common problems that arise in the field of environmental history. Many historians write with a misconception that “conservation is denoted into a single school of thought.” This sort of thinking oversimplifies the environmental movement, especially because conservation had many different facets and was divided into many sub-categories. The second problem Nash identifies is a, “Manichean orientation,” in which some environmental historians paint one side as the “good guys” versus the “bad guys.” Nash points out that this is problematic considering the common good that both sides were trying to achieve. He also criticizes historians’ disregard for keeping the issues in the context of the past. He describes this problem as the lack of “understanding the past in its own terms.”<sup>1</sup>

The field of environmental history is fairly recent. The modern field began in the early 1960s. Lawrence Rakestraw’s “Conservation History: An Assessment,” looks at a previous period of time, providing perspective as to where the environmental history came from. Similarly, Richard White’s “American Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field,” looks from the 1960s forward, examines the direction that the field started in, and where it is going. Although White’s article was published in 1985 in the *Pacific Historical Review*, there is still some value to his comments on the field of environmental history from the late 1950s and early 1960s, to the mid-1980s.<sup>2</sup>

Widely considered to be the first influential works in environmental history, Samuel P. Hays’ *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency* in 1959 and Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness in the American Mind* in 1967, set the precedent for much of the scholarly works to follow in the field. I will provide a more in-depth look at these two books below. I will note here that there are two

slight distinctions in these works that reflect much of the field. Hays provides a more political view of conservation and uses the environment and conservation as more of a backdrop of progressivism from the 1880s to the 1920s, by looking at legislation and lobbying done in the . By contrast, Nash tends toward looking at the environment and how Americans perceived it and more specifically the wilderness and how they have preserved it. Therefore, these two ideas represent a political and intellectual history of the environment, while also showing the origins of the field of environmental history in the conservation movement. On an even more general level, Hays represents the utilitarian, conservationist view of the environment, while Nash leans on the preservation side.<sup>3</sup>

Environmental historians Abraham Hoffman and William Kahrl in 1981 and 1982, address the issue of Los Angeles obtaining water. They draw from Hays, while also questioning some of his conclusions. According to White, much of what Hoffman and Kahrl focus on revolves around the ideas of efficiency and predictable economic development. Another historian, William Robbins, has a similar view of Hoffman and Kahrl, focusing on their idea of “public interest of socially progressive conservation” in 1982. White explains what these historians were trying to show: “They see the [Los-Angeles, Owens Valley water] controversy as a struggle between private and municipal control of water.” This essentially was a new look or perspective on utilitarian conservation.<sup>4</sup> White connects this type of thinking to how the Hetch Hetchy controversy is usually seen and discussed as well.

On a somewhat different tangent, White goes on to discuss Nash’s views on conservation with an emphasis on wilderness. He describes wilderness as “the highway to the American psyche most favored by intellectual historians” and “Whether hated and feared, loved, or . . . beheld with a tortured ambivalence, wilderness has become the mythic core of the American experience.”<sup>5</sup> White makes the point that wilderness has always been a focal point for Americans, no matter what time

in history. There were two types of environmental schools of thought since the environmental protection had been first discussed in the 1890s, conservation and preservation. For example, White talks about a shift in biographies being written, from conservationists to preservationists, especially from Pinchot to Muir. However, to counter Nash's conclusion about "Wilderness and the American Mind." White seems to suggest that there is no definitive "American Mind" and that the nation is far too diverse in opinion for one single view to characterize all Americans. He goes on to say that this type of writing, if taken too far, can lead to problems in interpretation. He describes what historians that write like this typically do:

There is in some of these newer works an impatience with the bounds history itself imposes. The past may be another country, but for some authors a transcendent nature can wash away the boundaries that time creates. Instead of a search for historical context, there is an attempt to find a universal language shared by author and subject.<sup>6</sup>

The idea here is that some historians on this subject forget the historical context and try to understand the past in modern terms. This raises some serious questions about the conclusions of some historians as this type of presentism is something historians must constantly beware of falling into.

One example of presentism is the claim that San Francisco in attempting to get water from Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park, was violating the moral laws of nature and creating an environmental disaster. There is nothing wrong with that argument per se, however there must be an explanation of why San Francisco was attempting to obtain the water rights for that valley in the first place. Once it is made known that it was because of a water monopoly charging way too much for a basic need and other legitimate factors, the proper context can be established for understanding why something happened in the first place.

White addresses another subject behind the environmental history movement, National Parks. He examines the questions, “how and why they were created?” One particular historian, Alfred Runte, poses an interesting, but controversial explanation in 1979. He suggests that “the government in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries protected only ‘economically worthless’ lands in the park system.”<sup>7</sup> I would argue that this case could be made for Yosemite National Park, and in particular why the federal government even considered allowing San Francisco to build a dam inside the park itself. The government would not have given the city permission to build there if there was truly an environmental concern for the land. Rather, at that time, the thought for more along the lines of, in the words of Gifford Pinchot, “The greatest good for the greatest number of people.”<sup>8</sup>

An additional major school of thought does not fit into the “conservation or preservation” dichotomy. In the 1970s, with more environmental legislation being passed than ever before, neither of these views were to be seen. Some thought that this new environmental field could be classified under preservation, with Muir, but there was little to back up this claim, other than the idea that recent environmental advocates wanted to protect the environment. Historians like White now break down environmental history into three ideas: “biocentric (preservationist), economic (conservationist), and ecological.”<sup>9</sup>

Much of environmental history up until the end of the 1970s were focused on abstract rather than scientific nature. But after the 1970s, science became more important. White brings up a fundamental idea that should be asked when looking chronologically through environmental history: “Is scientific ecology really compatible with popular environmentalism?” The answer he gives for this is twofold and somewhat contradictory. He describes it as being both compatible and incompatible. It was compatible to complete the basic goal of proving the point of why the

ecological argument was a fair and logical one, but once that was affirmed, the environmental movement returned to Muir's philosophical idea, focusing on the ethics of humans and nature. These thoughts became manifested through works written about Native Americans and their relationship to the environment. Historians began looking at these people as examples of how to properly treat the environment. In the same light however, they also analyzed how Native Americans used certain resources and suggested modern ecologists could learn from it.<sup>10</sup>

Another trend was a more sociocultural look at the environment and the sociological repercussions of governmental regulations. White argues that this type of environmental history had little to do with the actual environment and was more about, "reflecting the society which views nature, thinks about it, and adopts policies concerning it." White argues that these historians do not spend enough time looking at the environmental aspect of their topics. He concludes that their arguments (political, social, etc.) are one-sided, only really looking at one aspect of the environment and not considering other perspectives. White asserts that scholarly works published in this time frame, which is roughly from the late 1970s and early 1980s, did not have enough environmental material to be considered environmental history. He gives the example of the fields in which environmental history stemmed from, political and intellectual history. Although political history can have environmental elements, that does not make it environmental history, as some were claiming during this time.<sup>11</sup> I disagree somewhat with this argument, partially because that would mean that this thesis probably could not fall under environmental history. Environmental history is something that has many facets and sub-categories, which I believe can include political and social history. White may be referring to a much narrower view of environmental history, concluding that these historians did not place the environment as much in the foreground as they should have.

There was another shift from this sort of thought, reverting to the original ideas of Nash and Hays. Historians John H. Perkins and Thomas R. Dunlap were partially responsible for this trend, while another historian, James Malin, followed in the early 1980s. Along with this shift came the emergence of a second school of thought that is still very popular today. These historians looked at social and environmental change and were “concerned with the consequences of the environmental changes humans had wrought.” In other words, climate change. Two major historians that helped lead the charge in this, at least one of whom is still prominent to this day are William Cronon and Albert Cowdrey. Cronon’s work *Changes in the Land* and Cowdrey’s *This Land, This South*, are two very successful attempts looking at this sort of thing.<sup>12</sup> Much earlier than 1983, when these works were written, was another very influential book tackling similar ideas about environmental change, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962. Although Carson was not a historian, what she wrote about still had an effect on the environmental community. On a side note of sorts, White makes mention of a historian, Alfred Crosby, who wrote about similar ideas of the human influence of the environment in the *Columbian Exchange*. However, White makes a point of saying that Crosby’s book was too biological and did not contain enough analysis of social and cultural history. He seems to be implying that there must be a fine balance between the different elements of history, whether it be political, social, cultural, or even environmental for that matter.<sup>13</sup>

A different direction in environmental history is land and water management, which was continued into the mid-1990s. This type of history is especially important to western historians and how water was used effectively, or not, during the twentieth century. Some historians that White mentions in this field still have a large influence in the field and have written respectable articles and books relating to water management in the West. These historians include Norris Hundley, Robert Dunbar, Donald Pisani and Tim Palmer. Norris Hundley Jr., also came to



prominence when writing about the history of California's water management in *The Great Thirst*, published in 1992. White is quick to point out that although many look at the Hetch Hetchy controversy as being the first of many clashes between preservationists and land developers, there are earlier instances where this type of conflict occurred, namely in historian Nelson Blake's *Land into Water, Water into Land* which talks about the land and water issues of Florida.<sup>14</sup>

Since the 1980s, and continuing today, interest has been growing in the field of environmental history due to the passing of environmental regulations. White describes it as "providing a new context for the study of economic influences on the environment." This could be an extension of Cronan and Cowdrey's work on environmental change, or even a response to those works. This sort of writing has continued as of the past year or so, and will no doubt go on. White concludes his article talking about how environmental historians need to make sure they ask the basic question of what defines environmental history. He also points out that they should not necessarily constrain the environment to an idea or an intellectual thought, but rather as a living, entity that is constantly changing.<sup>15</sup>

White's analysis of how the field of environmental history began and developed is an interesting look and raises some questions along with some accusations. He gives a detailed and full description of how environmental history transitioned from being a small subfield of political history, with Hays talking about utilitarianism and Nash talking about preservation to the addition of ecology. He has strict standards and criticizes having too much or too little environmental information and historical premise as not "true environmental history." Although some of the deviation he points out is true, it is also justified. He does, however, clarify that many works he criticizes have some commonality, appearing to be one sided or looking at only one aspect of the environment. I agree there should be more of an effort to see multiple perspectives of how the

environment is viewed in order to gain a better understanding. Additionally, both White and Nash criticize other historians for not understanding the historical context of why some environmental events happened.

Although White criticizes the dichotomy of preservation versus conservation, I believe it to be important in understanding the issue concerning the controversy of Hetch Hetchy Valley. One particular article where this is talked about to a large extent is Christine Oravec's *Conservation vs. Preservationism: The "Public Interest" in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy* in 1984. She describes these two opposing sides similarly to how White does, with conservation being associated with utilitarianism and preservation with keeping the valley as it was. Oravec also brings up an interesting point about the so-called "public interest." She describes there being a difference between what was described as public interest by either side, and what the public interest actually was. Both sides hotly debated what side the "public interest" was on. There is no sure answer to this question, as the public was interested in either side, depending on where they lived. For example, if they lived within the city of San Francisco and read the *Chronicle*, *the Examiner*, *the Call*, etc. they were most likely in favor of the dam. However, if they lived outside of where this potential dam would be in effect and read *The Sierra Club Bulletin* or were part of some kind of nature club in your respective city, they were probably against the dam. Public interest was very much a matter of opinion in this issue, although I would argue that either side used this idea effectively to some degree, whether it was John Muir and his grassroots effort to prevent the dam or William Randolph Hearst and his newspaper empire that spread support for the dam across the country. Preservation and conservation are very interesting terms to use as they themselves are difficult to come up with singular definitions that span over time. However, I will go into more detail about these terms later on.<sup>16</sup>

White's point about preservation returning to the forefront of scholarly works still holds true to some degree today. The change happened in the 1970s, with many environmental safety measures taken and new National Parks being created. Over time the focus has moved from key characters in the conservation movement like Gifford Pinchot to people associated with preservation like John Muir. This certainly has changed how historians today look at past events like Hetch Hetchy. This can especially be seen in the 2009 documentary by Ken Burns, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. He takes a favorable approach to Muir and others, giving off the notion that it was an "environmental crusade." Burns spends little time looking at the legitimacy of Pinchot and San Francisco's cause to build a dam in Hetch Hetchy, making them seem like the enemy in this situation.<sup>17</sup> Other works reflect this change in thought but, as Nash and White point out, when controversies like Hetch Hetchy are taken out of context it changes how they are viewed. My argument is that San Francisco is not the enemy, but rather a victim of a water monopoly and the private agendas of some politicians, as well as the desire to find a reliable water source for a place that holds the simple substance in such high regard, not only for drinking, but for irrigation and basic functions that many Americans take for granted. Each side is justified and one or the other should not be labeled as bad or good. Historian Dayton Duncan described the Hetch Hetchy dam as "the lesser of two goods."<sup>18</sup>

The two founding works on modern environmental history by Hays and Nash are established on the two differing views in the field of environmental history, conservation and preservation. The first issue that is most commonly addressed is that of environmentalism and more specifically, the development of conservationism. There is no one better to explain the importance of this than Samuel P. Hays in *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*. Hays, in general, looks at the conservation movement from its beginnings to, for the most part, the time the

book was published, 1959. He describes the conservation movement as being “cast in the framework of a moral struggle between the virtuous ‘people,’ and the evil ‘interests.’” There are many crusading qualities of this movement and Hays draws parallels like “defenders of spiritual values and national character.” He states in the introduction that there was a large distinction between rhetoric and reality in the conservation movement. Specifically, one part of the movement was all talk, but there was little behind that talk in the form of action. At first it was seen as a scientific movement as well as a political one that the average American could not grasp or hold onto. The main purpose of this book is spelled out very clearly in the introduction, describing it as “an examination of the ideas and values of conservation leaders as a special group in American society, and an analysis of the wider implications of their attempt to work out the concept of efficiency in resource management.”<sup>19</sup>

The main chapters in question take up a majority of the book, as its topic is of great importance in understanding the whole picture of conservation and its relevance to the Hetch Hetchy Controversy. Chapter 2, “Store the Floods,” talks about irrigation and how the federal government’s involvement increased. Hays focuses on a few specific people like Gifford Pinchot, Theodore Roosevelt, several senators, and other contributors. This book also goes into some detail about Pinchot’s involvement in the creation of the United States Forest Service and its growth from a small insignificant sub-department of the Department of Agriculture to an important asset in maintaining the forests of the West and the “taming of the nation’s rivers.” Hays begins with the rise of organized conservation, but towards the end, makes apparent the flaws of the movement and how it slowly began to fall apart. Problems are not only in the privately led business sector, but within the federal government, specifically when the Army Corps of Engineers fought back on water conservation. In the final chapters, Hays discusses the correlation between conservation and

the Progressive Movement. He talks about how the movement conformed to the ideals of Progressivism, especially monopolism. Hays does an excellent job of summarizing and analyzing the conservation movement as a whole and its distinct brand at the time of its development.

One of the best historians on the subject of environmentalism and nature, Roderick Nash, covers a topic that is sometimes overlooked. In a book called *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Nash argues that wilderness is not defined by a single term. It is an unfamiliar and chaotic place that can also be beautiful, elevating and a delight to the observer. Nash takes special care to properly define wilderness, but not by social assumptions, which is the most common thing to do. In several chapters he talks specifically about preservation and its importance in American history. He describes the national parks and how John Muir got involved with them, and framed the Hetch Hetchy issue from a preservationist perspective. Nash talks about the origins of the national park system, starting with Yellowstone and how it was the first large-scale attempt to preserve wilderness. He refers to the ideas of Catlin, Thoreau, Hammond and Marsh and argues their dream of preservation finally bore fruit. Although the bill to make Yellowstone National Park a reality was passed in 1872, it was not until much later that the potential of this land was fully realized. One of the more interesting parts of this is that Congress turned down proposals from railroads in favor of the park.

In the next chapter Nash goes into Muir's involvement with the parks. He points out that wilderness preservation was created unintentionally because nature faced a problem of not having anyone to "represent" it. This is where John Muir stepped in. Muir was educated and learned much in college about Transcendentalism, to which he was drawn like a moth to a light. Later, he moved to California and found Yosemite Valley, in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and became primarily concerned with its nature and conservation. What is interesting is the definition of conservation at

this point in history, the 1870s. Conservation at the time would have been defined as preservation, not the wise use of resources that was developed by Gifford Pinchot later on in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, Nash covers the issue of Hetch Hetchy Valley from an interesting perspective, addressing Muir's thoughts on the dam, as he raised ethical questions and protested until the bill was passed in 1913. Nash goes past the Hetch Hetchy Controversy, and looks at its short and long-term effects, notably the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. He argues the vigor that Muir had was instilled in the American people and continued to persist, even though he died shortly after the Hetch Hetchy bill was passed.

In *The Great Thirst*, Norris Hundley Jr lays out an extraordinarily detailed history of water in the state of California. He goes all the way back to how Native Americans used it in the West to present day issues and concerns. One of the main themes of the book is the constant change of human values and what human beings do to the waterscape. This theme fits into the controversy over the Hetch Hetchy dam. While Norris points out that the development of technology was important and played a pivotal role in how water was used, he focuses more on that human interaction with the natural environment. He discusses the important and crucial role that government had in shaping water policy, including local, regional, provincial, state and national. One of the basic themes Norris brings out in *The Great Thirst* is that water comes down to private-versus-government interests, not only in California, but in the West in general. Norris brings this idea out, solidifying its importance and arguing that "local experience has full meaning when seen in the framework of the national experience."<sup>20</sup>

Many of the other sources in my thesis cover a range of topics, drawing from many prominent historians in the field of environmental history. I attempted to vary my sources as much as possible in order to not fall into the pitfalls of taking certain historical events out of context and

addressing both the preservationist and the conservationist side. Both sides have justified viewpoints and I tried to look at them without bias to see how each felt about the damming of Hetch Hetchy Valley. Since I am looking at federal involvement in the controversy as well, the views of presidents and their respective cabinets take on much interest. To further my understanding of the implications of politicians' decisions, I examined the Congressional Record and relevant bills on the issue. These sources provided me with a much more conflicted view than I originally thought existed among senators and representatives regarding the Hetch Hetchy dam. In addition to understanding what the politicians thought, public opinion, or at least what people read, also interested me greatly. So I read multiple contemporary newspapers and recreational journals that had news or opinions of the Hetch Hetchy issue.

My thesis raises some interesting questions regarding environmentalism as a whole and how far humans are willing to go to sustain themselves. If White is correct, my thesis might not technically fall under the umbrella of environmental history, because of my focus on the political and social aspects of the Hetch Hetchy Controversy, but affected numerous areas that included more than just the environment. My goal is to portray this controversy in a fashion that places bias aside and looks at why it occurred in the first place, why it lasted so long, and why it concluded with damming the valley instead of letting it be.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> Roderick Nash, *The American Environment* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1976), xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Part of this literature review is an analysis of Richard White's article "Environmental History," which is an in-depth historiography of the works from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s, when the article was written. Some of my own opinions are obviously sprinkled throughout that analysis, but overall White does a good job of summarizing the timeline. I am partly using his article as a timeline to follow because it is so organized and useful. Of course, this is not entirely about Richard White's article, although it does give a good starting point for addressing how environmental history began and how it developed.

<sup>3</sup> Richard White, "Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field," *Pacific Historical Review* 54, No. 3 (August 1985): 298-300.

<sup>4</sup> White, "Environmental History," 301-302, 303.

<sup>5</sup> White, "Environmental History," 303.

<sup>6</sup> White, "Environmental History," 305.

<sup>7</sup> White, "Environmental History," 308.

<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 69

<sup>9</sup> White, "Environmental History," 310-312.

<sup>10</sup> White, "Environmental History," 313-315.

<sup>11</sup> White, "Environmental History," 316-317.

<sup>12</sup> White, "Environmental History," 318-319, 321-322.

<sup>12</sup> White, "Environmental History," 323.

<sup>14</sup> White, "Environmental History," 326-328.

<sup>15</sup> White, "Environmental History," 329-335.

<sup>16</sup> Christine Oravec, "Conservation vs. Preservationism: the 'Public Interest' in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 444-450.

<sup>17</sup> Gabriel L. Mansfield, "The Forbidden Water: San Francisco and Hetch Hetchy Valley," *Historia* 27 (2018): 24.

<sup>18</sup> *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, season 1, episode 2, "The Last Refuge (1890-1915)," directed by Ken Burns, aired September 28, 2009 on Public Broadcasting Service.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *The Gospel of Efficiency* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1-5.

<sup>20</sup> Norris Hundley Jr., *The Great Thirst* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 1-7.



## Chapter 2: Environment

---

The Hetch Hetchy controversy involves both political and social history. However, an environmental perspective makes the most sense given that the controversy revolved around water management and whether a change in the environment should be made to benefit the people of San Francisco. Although there is some argument about whether the conservation and preservation categorizations are representative of all parties, I believe that they are warranted, given that the majority of historians writing on this issue use them. Furthermore, there are many environmental factors that played an important role in the decision making for the dam. For example, this controversy began to set a new precedent for how water in the American West was viewed and how it was handled. The environmental perspective of preservation and conservation, although subtle, had many differences in their ideologies that made them unique and ultimately shaped how the controversy unfolded and was resolved.

At the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century, the outlook on the environment began to change. The United States slowly began to transition from a land of limitless natural resources, to a realization that these resources were actually depletable. Starting in the 1870s and 1880s, efforts were made to preserve or conserve the land that came into possession by the federal government. The federal government also began to play an active role in resource management all over the country, using the department of the interior and eventually creating new subordinate departments like the U.S. Geological Survey and the Department of Forestry. Americans became more aware of the environmental impact they were making.<sup>1</sup>

Originally, this movement began simply as the conservation movement in the 1880s, but slowly, more and more people began to differ about what “conservation” actually meant. It was split into three categories and explicitly discussed by historian, Clayton R. Koppes, who

described them as efficiency, equity and esthetics. People in favor of efficiency and equity shared similar views. Efficiency was geared toward scientific knowledge and how to handle the environment in a way that could benefit the most people, while still maintaining certain norms. Similarly, equity was of significant importance to many advocates of conservation. Equity was the position that these environmental resources should be allowed for everyone one to have, regardless of their status in society. This type of thinking had taken root with the anti-monopoly movement during the Progressive Era. Koppes describes this as being “not only a battle for efficiency but a struggle for political liberty.” Unfortunately, there was sometimes an irony to the anti-monopoly movement when it was easier to work with large corporations, in contrast with small business owners over the use of the land.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most prominent individuals who helped pioneer the conservation movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was Gifford Pinchot. His relationship to forestry goes back to his father and grandfather’s business. As a native of Connecticut and later New York, Pinchot grew up having a lavish lifestyle, in a family that was very wealthy. His mothers’ father, Amos Eno, had many real estate developments in New York City along very well-known streets like Broadway and Fifth avenue, making him very wealthy. Likewise, Pinchot’s father, James, had founded his fortune in the Pennsylvania timber industry and later became successful selling home accessories and décor. Ironically, his father and paternal grandfather had also operated within the acceptable practices of the time with their timber business, cutting down and through the Pennsylvania countryside with no regard for the consequences, only the bottom line. James Pinchot had therefore felt somewhat obligated to return the favor of the destruction he had caused by encouraging his son to pursue forestry after he had finished at Yale.<sup>3</sup>

After he finished at Yale, Pinchot obeyed his father's wishes and went to Europe to enter into the French school, *L'Ecole nationale forestiere* in Nancy. It was once he was immersed in learning about forestry that Pinchot had his "first concrete understanding of the forest as a crop," meaning that timber was something that was not simply just cut and destroyed. It was to be regulated and kept controlled for people to use. While Pinchot was in France studying, he gained more of an ideology toward equity being important not just in forestry, but in conservation in general. He believed that "efficiency was but a means to the greater goal of equity" and that "natural resources 'belonged to all the people and should be retained in public control to prevent their concentration in the hands of the few.'"<sup>4</sup>

After finishing school and spending some time in the Carolinas working privately, the opportunity arose for him to fulfill his ambitions of equity in conservation. By 1898, Pinchot was working as the Chief Forester for the Federal Government after the previous one, Bernard E. Fernow had resigned. Before Pinchot had stepped into the role, the Division of Forestry was on the brink of being shut down by the government for not being useful. Pinchot greatly expanded its use and authority, putting regulations in place to protect forests owned by the federal government. He became accepting that politics and conservation were intertwined and fully supported many of Theodore Roosevelt's decisions as president. However, despite all of the success that Pinchot had during his time as head of the Forestry Division there were some drawbacks to how he ran the department. One of the largest problems was of equity concerned inequity among Americans. He found that it was easier to work with corporations than individuals regarding land and water rights. Eventually, he was forced from office by new president, William Howard Taft in 1910 as a result of not cooperating with him on key issues.<sup>5</sup>

Pinchot's views on forestry and conservation reveal how he saw the Hetch Hetchy controversy and how he justified his actions. When you look at his desire for equality in natural resources, it makes sense he would be for Hetch Hetchy. John Meyer summarizes Pinchot's concerns during his time as Chief Forester as "waste and inefficiency in the use of natural resources and concentration of control over these resources in the hands of powerful monopolies and other special interests."<sup>6</sup> He saw the use of the Tuolumne River and Hetch Hetchy Valley as a way to make the most out of "potentially useless land" and keep it away from hands that it should not belong to, namely the Spring Valley Water Company.<sup>7</sup> Pinchot wanted the people to be able to have the freedom of cheap clean water in San Francisco, considering that since the 1860s, this was not the case. He was strictly anti-monopoly and firmly against the actions taken by the Spring Valley Water Works to retain their hold on the city and manipulate the system to favor them.<sup>8</sup> Gifford Pinchot was still sympathetic to the cause of John Muir in preventing the dam from being built. He wrote to President Roosevelt, "I fully sympathize with the desire...to protect the Yosemite National Park, but I believe that the highest possible use which could be made of it would be to supply pure water to a great center of population."<sup>9</sup>

John Muir, on the other hand, was quite the opposite of Gifford Pinchot as far as their respective origins and introductions to the environment is concerned. Muir was born in Scotland, and while still young emigrated to Wisconsin, where he grew up. His family were Calvinists and were certainly not as well off as Gifford Pinchot's. However, Muir left his family in 1860 to pursue a career in industry. Due to an unfortunate accident while working, he decided to become more involved with nature and studying it. John Muir took on multiple names after this and grew not only into a nature-loving enthusiast, but also the author many titles related to studying nature. John M. Meyer contrasts him with Gifford Pinchot's separation of nature and politics. Muir did

this in a few different ways. He saw nature from a transcendentalist point of view, with its “ecocentric viewpoint” and a simplified take on the subject. A religious aspect was also at play, but with more of a transcendentalist view of religion. For example, Muir wrote about the existence of a divine being and presence, and described nature and the wilderness as “a temple.” In other ways, Muir tended to speak like Pinchot, describing some of nature, like timber, as a necessity.<sup>10</sup>

Transcendentalism was at the forefront of what Muir argued, especially later in his life. With the Hetch Hetchy Controversy, it became clear that this was part of his position against damming the valley. In a 1912 essay, he distinctly summarized his view on the subject: “Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people’s cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man.”<sup>11</sup> Here Muir is expressly using religious language to describe Hetch Hetchy Valley. He uses this type of wording often when describing nature, especially in order to further the point of preserving it. Muir was no stranger to transcendentalism. While studying at the University of Wisconsin, Muir befriended, a professor and his wife there Dr. Ezra and Jeanne Carr. Much of Muir’s success was a result of these two people, who introduced and helped develop his thoughts his view of nature and transcendentalism. He read the works of Swiss naturalist Louis Agassiz as well as transcendentalist literature written by William Wordsworth, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson.<sup>12</sup>

Transcendentalism began well before Muir, in late 1830s New England. This movement was heavily influenced by at least two major philosophies according to Donald N. Koster, a prominent philosopher. Emerson, Thoreau, and others often used religious language not necessarily describing God as a redeemer or savior, but as a divine being who created nature and

its wonders. Using phrases like “the One or Primeval Being.” Both Emerson and Thoreau were descended from Puritan families and religion influenced their including, Emerson’s *Nature* in 1836 and Thoreau’s *Walden* in 1854 .<sup>13</sup> As a result, many who read their works afterward, like a young John Muir, were inspired to approach life from a different perspective. This is where the distinction between Gifford Pinchot and John Muir is so stark. Gifford Pinchot believed in the hard numbers of resource management and being able to use them to the fullest extent. That particular interpretation was not necessarily flawed in and of itself, but on the contrary suggests something different. John Muir saw, most of the time, that nature is something to be seen as living and thriving and should be taken care of.<sup>14</sup>

By the late 1860s and early 1870s Muir was in California, working as a surveyor. After many years of research and published works, he decided to form an organization to support his beliefs about nature. The Sierra Club was founded in 1892 and in its mission statement said:

to explore, enjoy and render accessible the mountain regions of the Pacific Coast; to publish authentic information concerning them; to enlist the support and cooperation of the people and the government in preserving the forests and other natural features of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.<sup>15</sup>

This was essentially John Muir’s political rally to those who agreed with him. Although Muir and this organization were not inherently political, it started to become a useful tool for lobbying in favor of trying to preserve wilderness over the country as well holding to its mission statement above. Since being founded over 125 years ago, it still stands as an activist group fighting for preservation and of nature. The Sierra Club, according to Meyer, was “strongly committed to the protection of nature for spiritual and aesthetic values...while sharing Pinchot’s general policy prescriptions beyond these boundaries.” Despite how effective the Sierra Club was early on at deterring businesses and corporations from destroying wilderness, the Hetch Hetchy issue created a dilemma. It caused a split in the club, with some agreeing with Muir and others

believing it to be in the best interest of the people to dam Hetch Hetchy Valley. Many members who disagreed with Muir were native to San Francisco. Muir's pressure to use the Sierra Club as a grassroots political organization discouraged many members from continuing their involvement in the organization.<sup>16</sup>

John Muir's involvement in the controversy is very heavy, as he spearheaded the group that was against building the dam in the valley. I will go into more detail of his grassroots involvement in chapter three, but the role of his personal relationships with some in Washington is important to recognize here. Gifford Pinchot and John Muir had a close friendship well before this controversy broke out. In fact, for a number of years, they held the same beliefs about conservation and preservation of the wilderness. However, in 1897, after multiple disagreements about how federal land should be used for harvesting timber and animal grazing, they parted ways. Muir believed in not cutting those monopolies a break, but Pinchot wanted an appeasement policy, allowing them to be able use the land more freely. A biographer of Muir, Linnie Marsh Wolfe summarized their differences as "the two schools of conservationists – the strictly utilitarian, commercial group who followed Pinchot, and the aesthetic-utilitarian group who followed Muir."<sup>17</sup> Wolfe pointed out that Pinchot was more concerned with the economic and environmental outcome, where Muir wanted the beauty of the areas to be considered as well.

Another close relationship in Washington was the twenty-sixth, Theodore Roosevelt. The two men shared a lot in common, including a love of the outdoors, studying nature and preserving it. They had gone on multiple camping trips in Yosemite while Roosevelt was president. Muir held Roosevelt in high regard and considered him a personal friend. Roosevelt felt similarly toward Muir. However, when President Roosevelt sided with Pinchot on the issue of damming Hetch Hetchy, Muir was astonished. He proceeded to write to the president,

pleading with him to change his mind and consider all that would be lost with the valley being filled with water. Roosevelt had considered complying with Muir and compromising, but after realizing the cost that would be to his reelection and the peoples popular support of him, he could not find a way around the matter. He wrote back to Muir stating that “interfer[ing] with the permanent material development of the state instead of helping...the result will be bad.” Unfortunately for Muir, not even the president would side with him. Muir continued to fight a losing battle to stop the dam from being built, but ultimately failed to do so.<sup>18</sup>

The near desperation for the city of San Francisco to obtain water becomes clearer when we consider the context of the importance of water in the American West. Water was and still can be seen as something to be potentially exploited by water companies because of its lack of abundance, rather than as a right or necessity as it is in most parts of the United States. After San Francisco was founded and in the 1850s, water was being brought in by private water companies that leased it out to the city. Eventually, these small companies consolidated into a monopoly called the Spring Valley Water Works. However, this type of problem was not unique to San Francisco. Los Angeles and Sacramento had similar problems in obtaining municipal ownership and fighting with monopolies in order to access affordable water. Many of the problems with water, especially in California, came with the sudden influx of population due to the goldrush in the 1840s and 1850s. Much of the water in that day was brought by very primitive means because of the lack of technology available in such a remote part of the country. Fires were also common because of the inability to put them out fast enough.<sup>19</sup>

Water was not only important for drinking and municipal use, but for agriculture, farming and lumber. Irrigation of the land and manipulation of the rivers in the area allowed farmers to grow their crops much more effectively, and provided a steady supply of water. Rivers



themselves were heavily used by loggers to transport cut timber downstream to a sawmill or a distributor. This type of movement was vital because of the lack of roads in the area and the ease of transporting material from where the tree was felled to the sawmill, etc. Notably in the West, water and monopolies were synonymous. They would raise major problems when buying the land rights to the head of a river and damming it, causing water loss downstream to farmers for irrigation. Many times large corporations would buy up large swaths of land in order to charge ranchers for using it as pasture. With the ever-present danger of drought, this problem led to much crop loss, particularly in the Central Valley and San Joaquin Valley before better systems were in place in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Los Angeles was in trouble around the same time of the early 1900s to 1920s due to rapid growth and not enough water to supply the population. It therefore looked to Owens Valley in order to use the river that ran through as an aqueduct. The city ran into many problems with the ranchers in the area who used the river to irrigate and feed livestock. Eventually the city won out and was able to build the aqueduct. However, when it was completed in the late 1920s and into the 1940s, the city was already overusing the water supply. The problem was solved, but then again in the mid-1970s, and all the way into the mid-1990s, ranchers were still trying to limit the use of the aqueduct for the city. San Francisco and Los Angeles had similar problems in obtaining water rights. Both cities used some underhanded practices to get what they wanted. They also reflected the Progressive Era and the idea of bringing down monopolies and using more democratic means to answer the people's problems. Historically, the physical, corporate and political climates of the West have combined to make water rights a significant issue.<sup>21</sup>

The search for municipal control of water did not begin for San Francisco in 1900 when it applied for water rights to the Tuolumne River but rather much earlier. Hetch Hetchy had in fact

been brought up before that moment as well. In 1892, the U.S. Geological Survey had done some work by the Tuolumne River and had surveyed the area around Hetch Hetchy. Although the report by J.H. Quinton and J.P. Lippincott was fairly short, it gave the dimensions of the valley, and providing details as to where a dam could be built, resources for building, and other information. The report suggested the benefit of a dam being built in Hetch Hetchy because of high granite cliffs and a large, mostly flat meadow floor.<sup>22</sup>

Before the city had thought to consider Hetch Hetchy as a potential site for a reservoir, there was some skepticism of whether or not this area would be of benefit. When an offer from George M. Harris, a local resident claiming to own that area of land was submitted, city officials were skeptical and thought these were false claims. It was even suggested that some of the reports given to support his claim were forged. The report by Quinton and Lippincott was brought to the city's attention, along with a second report that the dam had the potential to provide "an unfailing supply of pure water."<sup>23</sup>

Marden Manson, San Francisco city engineer and C.E. Grunsky, a fellow engineer, compiled a number of reports, letters, correspondence, and other documents from 1900 to 1908. Along with these reports are Manson's own notes and thoughts regarding certain conversations that took place, reports that were submitted and letters written. The documents provide interesting insights into the perspectives of the dam supporters. Manson began the report by talking about the history of San Francisco's water problems and how a lack of municipal ownership was a significant issue in the city's history up to that point. He discussed the ever-present problem of the Spring Valley Water Works, a monopoly that by 1865, controlled most of the water suppliers in San Francisco County. Due to lack of competition, water prices were high and city officials first began looking into a new source of water in 1871 and 1872. After that

effort failed, there was an attempt in 1875 to purchase the water rights to a local creek, but the Spring Valley Water Works undermined the transaction by buying them first. Only one year later, San Francisco sought to purchase some land from the Spring Valley Water Works, only to decline the offer later because the asking price was too high. By 1900, surveys were done on the areas surrounding San Francisco to find a place in which the city could purchase the water rights. After looking everywhere from as far north as Lake Tahoe and as far east as the Tuolumne River in Yosemite National Park, They decided the Tuolumne River and Lake Eleanor, which was not far from the river, because of its clean water, size of the proposed reservoir, hydroelectric power, and other advantages.<sup>24</sup> Manson went into detail about each benefit the river would bring, particularly the clean water that would save the city a considerable amount of money, not having to worry about a treatment plant. Because the Tuolumne River began in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and many of its tributaries came from snow runoff from the winter, its purity was unrivaled at the time. He compared other cities, particularly those on the East Coast, like New York and Philadelphia, which had gone to considerable lengths to ensure that they could get clean water. Manson also discusses the hoops that must be jumped through and other dilemmas in with monopolies.<sup>25</sup>

Manson next turned to the availability of other water sources and identified the major factors in what made a good water source including “quality, quantity, reliability of service and cost.” The factor of distance, which is nearly 200 miles, was weighed against the importance of not needing filtration systems due to the quality of this water supply. He gave examples of places in the Midwest and East Coast that needed such systems and explained and the water was both expensive and of lesser quality.<sup>26</sup>

Manson went into further detail in the report about the other options suggested and how they would be considered inadequate in comparison to Hetch Hetchy. After discussing some of the other rivers like the American, the Yuba, and the Feather, Manson made it clear that these were insufficient, either because of lack of detailed planning on the city's part, or the reoccurring problems with those sites. Following this, he writes about the problem of the Spring Valley Water Works and why purchasing water rights from its property would not be in the city's best interest. His basic argument was that, although they were supplying the city with a considerable amount of water per day, the water needed to be filtered and was not of the best quality. There was also the problem of how much the monopoly would charge the city.<sup>27</sup>

After going into remarkable detail about each of the water sites suggested by the city, Manson moved on to talk about the Tuolumne River and more specifically Hetch Hetchy Valley. One of the first advantages he pointed out was that the mouth of the valley had a very narrow opening that would be perfectly suited for a dam. The reservoir would hold a considerable amount of water, around 32,418,000,000 gallons. Another benefit Manson explained was that the area was nearly uninhabited and fairly isolated, making the likelihood of the water being contaminated small. One of the major perks of the dam being on the Tuolumne River was the ability to have hydroelectric power. If there was to be hydroelectric power from the dam, it could provide electricity to the surrounding areas, like parts of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys.<sup>28</sup>

One problem the city was the farmers downstream who would be affected by the dam. The Modesto and Turlock Irrigation districts petitioned against San Francisco obtaining the rights to the river. The two districts argued that the waters of the Tuolumne River were owned by the state and could not be owned by the city. They stated that reducing the amount of water they

would receive from the river could severely impact crops. These two districts objected to San Francisco on other grounds as well. They believed that if San Francisco owned the headwaters it would infringe upon their rights to use the water for irrigation. Furthermore, there were other sources that could have been chosen that would not affect the farmers so adversely. They even argued that the Tuolumne River would not be able to sustain the city after a few years. The basic argument that these districts made was that there was not enough water to go around for everyone and any change to the status quo could be detrimental farmers in the valley.<sup>29</sup>

The environment played a very significant role in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy. It shaped who was involved and why, like the overarching question of conservationism or preservationism. Although some of the views of the two main representatives of these ideologies, Gifford Pinchot and John Muir, were more political, their views about the environment were key to understanding their differences. Gifford Pinchot's involvement in the development of American conservation and forestry meant that he looked at this controversy from a utilitarian perspective. By contrast, John Muir had a more ecocentric view of nature that was influenced by Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau, one that environmental historians have labeled as "preservationist." Providing context as to why water was so important and crucial for San Francisco and for the greater American West allows for a better understanding of decisions that were made and why. Looking at the reports by the U.S. Geological Survey and by city engineers gives a sense of what exactly could be gained from either view of the environment as well as the cold, hard details of each option considered. Such considerations force a reanalysis of who was in the right and who was in the wrong. As is discussed by many historians, there was not necessarily a right and a wrong side in the Hetch Hetchy controversy, but instead two rights clashing against a common good.<sup>30</sup>

## Endnotes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Clayton R. Koppes, "Efficiency/Equity/Esthetics: Toward a Reinterpretation of American Conservation," *Environmental Review* 11, No. 2 (1987): 127-129.
- <sup>2</sup> Koppes, "Efficiency/Equity/Esthetics," 129-131.
- <sup>3</sup> Char Miller, "The Greening of Gifford Pinchot," *Environmental History Review* 16, No. 3 (Autumn 1992): 4-6.
- <sup>4</sup> Miller, "The Greening of Gifford Pinchot," 7.
- <sup>5</sup> Miller, "The Greening of Gifford Pinchot," 6,8-10.
- <sup>6</sup> John M. Meyer, "Gifford Pinchot, John Muir, and the Boundaries of Politics in American Thought," *Polity* 30, No. 2 (Winter 1997): 269.
- <sup>7</sup> See the Literary Review about Alfred Runte and his idea of early National Parks being set aside because of their "worthlessness."
- <sup>8</sup> Marsden Manson, and C. E. Grunsky. *Reports on the water supply of San Francisco, California, 1900 to 1908, inclusive*. (San Francisco, CA: Britton and Rey, 1908) 3; Ray W. Taylor, *Hetch Hetchy*, (San Francisco: Ricardo J. Orozco, 1926), 100. The name was changed for legal reasons as a result of the number of bonds held by the company.
- <sup>9</sup> Meyer, "Boundaries of Politics in American Thought," 273; Full quote is in Roderick Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind*, p. 164.
- <sup>10</sup> Meyer, "Boundaries of Politics in American Thought," 275-278.
- <sup>11</sup> John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra and Selected Essays* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2011), 314.
- <sup>12</sup> Linnie Marsh Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 74-80.
- <sup>13</sup> Donald N. Koster, *Transcendentalism in America* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 5-6.
- <sup>14</sup> Meyer, "Boundaries of Politics in American Thought," 277-279.
- <sup>15</sup> Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir*, 254.
- <sup>16</sup> Meyer, "Boundaries of Politics in American Thought," 280.
- <sup>17</sup> Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir*, 268-276.
- <sup>18</sup> Wolfe, *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir*, 311-314; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 163-164.
- <sup>19</sup> Norris Hundley Jr., *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water 1770's-1990's* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 192-193; Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 30-35.
- <sup>20</sup> Norris Hundley Jr., *The Great Thirst*, 86-90.
- <sup>21</sup> Norris Hundley Jr., *The Great Thirst*, 85-91, 192-200.

---

<sup>22</sup> US Geological Survey, *12th Annual Report of the U.S. Geological Survey, 1892*, 36-38.

<sup>23</sup> Ray W. Taylor, *Hetch Hetchy*, 32-33.

<sup>24</sup> Marsden Manson and C.E. Grunsky, *Reports on the Water Supply of San Francisco, California, 1900 to 1908, Inclusive* (San Francisco, CA: Britton and Rey, 1908), 5-9.

<sup>25</sup> Marsden Manson, *Reports on the Water Supply of San Francisco, California*, 9-13.

<sup>26</sup> Marsden Manson, *Reports on the Water Supply of San Francisco, California*, 14-22.

<sup>27</sup> Marsden Manson, *Reports on the Water Supply of San Francisco, California*, 22-25.

<sup>28</sup> Marsden Manson, *Reports on the Water Supply of San Francisco, California*, 51-58.

<sup>29</sup> Marsden Manson, *Reports on the Water Supply of San Francisco, California*, 170A-170G.

<sup>30</sup> Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy, 1908-1913," *Pacific Historical Review* 48, no. 2 (May 1979): 212.

### Chapter 3: Politics

---

Politics played a very important role in the outcome of the Hetch Hetchy Controversy. Not only was it an issue of the city of San Francisco and the State of California, but even to the federal level. This controversy is generally accepted as lasting thirteen years, three presidents, five interior secretaries, numerous hearings and debates in the House and Senate, multiple reports, and even a series of criminal trials and investigations. Indecisiveness, manipulation and corruption plagued this controversy from the beginning to the end, to an extent on both sides of the issue. Each president had his own interpretation of what the outcome of this should be and as a result, along with the respective Interior secretaries, prolonged the time in which it would take to pass or fail the bill that would allow San Francisco to build a dam on federal land in Yosemite National Park. The Hetch Hetchy Controversy exemplifies the Progressive Era. Theodore Roosevelt and the city wanted to tear down monopolies, but political machines controlled the vote and opinions of the people. Overall, understanding the politics in this controversy helps understand why decisions were made, why it took so long to be able to build the dam, and the motivations behind each individual involved.

In order to fully understand the Hetch Hetchy Controversy, a broader approach to the development of American Conservation must be taken into account. The increasing prominence of the federal government in conservation of natural resources did not occur until the 1880's and 1890's. The movement itself was based in science and technology, according to one of the pioneers of the environmental history field, Samuel P. Hays. But, he argues, it was also a political movement. Regulation of natural resources was key not necessarily by politicians, but rather by experts in the respective fields. Related to this, Hays looks at how the legislation and



regulation set by Congress shaped the public's view of the government, as well as the movement as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

Hays points to a few individuals who in the early days of the movement pressed for conservation in Congress. This included a member of the newly founded U.S. Geological Survey, Frederick H. Newell, George H. Maxwell, Francis G. Newlands, a senator from Nevada, and President Theodore Roosevelt. Others like Gifford Pinchot would join this distinguished list later on, but overall, these people would help to drive the federal government to become more involved in regulation of natural resources like timber, pasture, and water management. One of the first ways that the government became involved was the founding of the U.S. Geological Survey in the late 1880s by John Wesley Powell. Newell was also heavily involved in the development of this agency. It was not until the late 1890s that the federal government became more involved with irrigation and forest management.<sup>2</sup>

In 1891, the General Land Law Revision Act was passed in Congress, allowing for the president to create forest reserves by proclamation. This was the first type of real power the federal government had to directly regulate natural resources. Other bills were passed in regard to irrigation and developing land in the West, like the Carey Act of 1894. Newlands helped spearhead this approach to irrigation as his state, Nevada, needed some way to generate money and draw private businesses. Over the course of the 1890s and into the 1900s, large strides were taken in development of federal land use and regulation.<sup>3</sup> Many of these advancements came through legislation passed in Congress to give certain departments new powers. For example, the 1897 Forest Management Act allowed the Secretary of Interior power "to regulate the occupancy and use" of federal forests. A year later, Gifford Pinchot became the Chief of Department of Forestry, not quite the U.S. Forestry Service, which would be founded in 1905.<sup>4</sup>

Another statute in 1899 was passed by Congress that stated Congress must approve dams being built in navigable waterways.<sup>5</sup> This implied that Congress must approve every single dam that is built in a river, creek, stream, etc. In 1901, there was another was a partial expedient to the growing problem of having to approve all of these dams. The Right of Way Act gave the Department of Interior the ability to issue permits for water power reservoirs and irrigation works, but these were only temporary permits. It would not be until 1906 when the General Dam Act was passed that Congress only needed to approve of the grant rather than the plans and details of each dam.<sup>6</sup> This was meant to expedite the work and dams that could be approved quickly. The Act was again amended in 1910 to add an anti-monopoly clause to prevent overcharging for navigation of waterways with dams on them.<sup>7</sup>

The Hetch Hetchy Controversy spans the terms of three presidents, with three different views on how to handle the situation. The first president to deal directly with the issue was the twenty-sixth president, Theodore Roosevelt. Even before his presidency, Roosevelt was an ardent supporter of nature and conservation of the wilderness. In the late 1880s he founded the Boone and Crockett Club, which is still the oldest wildlife conservation club in existence. Roosevelt was a firm believer in the outdoors as well as the wilderness promoted “that vigorous manliness for the lack of which in a nation, as in an individual, the possession of no other qualities can possibly atone.” He often saw the outdoors, the wilderness and masculinity as synonymous and spoke regularly regarding this. When he found that the U.S. was becoming more involved in conservation and wilderness preservation, he wrote that “‘every believer in manliness...every lover of nature, every man who appreciates the majesty and beauty of the wilderness and of wild life’ to give them full support.” Roosevelt would speak repeatedly about how the “modern” man was becoming soft and too used to city dwelling and without the

challenge of living in the wilderness, which he harkened back to the American pioneers and forefathers decades before.<sup>8</sup>

Conservation had always been an important part of Roosevelt's life and when he came into the presidency in 1901, he was more than ready to carry out his plans of making the government more important in conserving natural resources. According to distinguished environmental historian Kendrick A. Clements, Roosevelt regarded conservation as an improvement upon the progressive policies of the past and in part, a way to combat monopolies. Along with this, he saw that conservation in the hands of experts would be beneficial to the government. Roosevelt would use this rationale to attempt to "make government more efficient and effective in serving the people." As mentioned before, Roosevelt had a close relationship with preservationist John Muir. The two would go on many hikes in the wilderness and discuss conservation and how to better the wilderness. This friendship would pay off for Muir when he suggested that Yosemite be included as a National Park, to which Roosevelt obliged. This was also the case for the Grand Canyon in becoming a national monument. Roosevelt would take advantage of the Antiquities Act of 1906, granting him the ability to set aside land under federal protection and be preserved.<sup>9</sup>

President Roosevelt was the first to pioneer in the environment in such a position. Many conservation policies were brought up by Roosevelt during both terms of his presidency, according to Dr. Melinda A. Mueller, a political science professor at Eastern Illinois University. At a conference in the White House in May 1908, the president stressed the importance of conserving natural resources like waterways, timber, soil, etc. He made suggestions for how to change Americans' thinking on this subject and how to improve upon it. Roosevelt also justified the government's involvement in regulating these resources, so as to inform the people of how it

benefits them in the long term, saving them from total depletion. Dr. Mueller points out that some of the wording he uses in this speech goes with some with preservationist ideals, but mostly focused on conservationist thoughts. This was most likely because Roosevelt did not want to lose the support of some industrialists and states.<sup>10</sup>

Despite Roosevelt being so clear on his stance for conservation, he was very much conflicted about the Hetch Hetchy Controversy. This was probably because of his close relationships to both Pinchot and Muir, who ironically were on opposing sides. Roosevelt held both men's opinions in high regard, but unfortunately for Muir, location also played an important factor in the president's final conclusion. Pinchot was in Washington and Muir was in California. Additionally, Roosevelt was constantly deferring to Pinchot on conservation matters in forestry and water. Pinchot's opinion on Hetch Hetchy, as previously mentioned, came from the idea that a water supply there "represented the greatest good for the greatest number of people" and saw Muir and his followers as being ignorant to the dire situation in San Francisco. Roosevelt agreed.<sup>11</sup>

When Muir found out about the president's position on the matter, he wrote with concern about the condition of Yosemite National Park and its future. Muir explicitly stated his stance on Hetch Hetchy and wanted the president to do something about it. Roosevelt wrote back wishing he could do more, but essentially described his situation as having his hands tied. Historian Robert Righter elaborates further by explaining that Roosevelt suggested to Muir that it would take more than a grassroots effort to prevent the dam from being built. Despite Muir's best attempts to win over the president's opinion about Hetch Hetchy, Roosevelt would not be swayed because of Pinchot and others' influence the matter, and not wanting to get the federal government involved with what he believed was a state and local issue. Although, shortly before

leaving office in December 1908, Roosevelt went back on what he said earlier, stating that both Yellowstone and Yosemite “should be protected and the scenery kept wholly unmarred.” However, for the majority of his presidency, Roosevelt sided with Pinchot and the conservationists in San Francisco in favor of damming the valley.<sup>12</sup>

When William Howard Taft assumed the presidency in 1909, he was given the Hetch Hetchy issue, but handled it much differently than Roosevelt. Taft and Roosevelt became good friends during William McKinley’s presidency and continued into Roosevelt’s term after McKinley was assassinated. The two had a close relationship, until the end of Roosevelt’s second term, when Taft won the 1908 election. After Taft became president, their friendship took a sudden turn for the worse as Taft disagreed with many of the decisions that Roosevelt had made while in office. One of the particular policies Taft clashed on was conservation. In fact, Roosevelt took offense at how much they disagreed over this issue. Once Taft took office, he began to undermine and reverse many of Roosevelt’s conservation policies and disrupt what Roosevelt had worked so hard to build. Taft also despised Pinchot, who was still serving as Chief Forester of the US Forestry Service. Pinchot was seen as a threat to Taft because he was so heavily involved in the Roosevelt administration. As a result of constant disagreements and problems arising from Pinchot, Taft fired him in January 1910. For most of his presidency, it was fairly uneventful, as Taft was many times at an impasse with Congress, failing to control the Progressives, conservatives, or even his own party the Republicans. Historian Lewis L. Gould describes his presidency as being credible, but in an unfavorable political climate.<sup>13</sup>

As one might expect, Taft’s opinion on the Hetch Hetchy Controversy also differed from Roosevelt’s. Determined to gain an important ally in Washington, soon after Taft took office Muir offered to take him and his cabinet to Yosemite. Muir saw promise that Taft would agree to

oppose the dam after taking him there. Soon after, Taft agreed with Muir to question the legitimacy of this proposal. He was in favor of investigating whether or not these water rights would be beneficial to the city of San Francisco. Although the rest of Taft's involvement was minimal in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy, his interior secretaries, Richard A. Ballinger and successor Walter L. Fisher, were much more occupied with the issue. Even after his presidency, Taft still supported Muir's cause.<sup>14</sup>

Not much is said on the last president involved in this controversy, Woodrow Wilson, although it lasted well into his second term. Wilson was in favor of the dam. This could be linked to his appointment of Franklin K. Lane as interior secretary, who was a native of San Francisco and served as the city attorney from 1899 to 1902. Many in San Francisco were obviously excited at the thought of this appointment, as this would nearly guarantee the approval of the dam by congress and the president. Many thought that Wilson chose Lane because he wanted to "make a clean sweep" of the matter. When the bill was signed into law by President Wilson, he recognized the work done by the preservationists saying that they were "good and well-meaning people who opposed the act" but their arguments were "not well founded." Overall, I believe that Wilson wanted to conclude this controversy that had dragged on for thirteen years and saw it in the best interest of the people of San Francisco, with the influence of his interior secretary, to favor the city and allow them to build a dam in Hetch Hetchy Valley.<sup>15</sup>

Although many presidents and their interior secretaries agreed on Hetch Hetchy, the latter was usually much more heavily involved in the affairs and had further detailed opinions about it. Despite the fact that this controversy lasted thirteen years, the beliefs of each interior secretary differed. Some were against the dam, like Ethan A. Hitchcock, Richard A. Ballinger, and partially Walter L. Fisher, while others like James R. Garfield, partially Walter L. Fisher, and

Franklin K. Lane were in favor of it. However, each had his own mostly unique reasoning for choosing that side.

The first Secretary of the Interior who was involved in this controversy was Ethan A. Hitchcock. He was there first when the mayor of San Francisco, James D. Phelan, submitted the application for the water rights to the valley in 1901. He originally denied the application in January 1903 because the water source was located inside Yosemite National Park. Hitchcock also pointed out that he might not have the authority to authorize the application if it was on private land. Then city attorney Franklin K. Lane appealed to the interior secretary to reconsider his decision. So then in December 1903, Hitchcock gave the same opinion as before, denying the application on essentially the same grounds, but further elaborating as to why he rejected it.<sup>16</sup>

In the letter, Hitchcock questioned why the city needed to replace what it already had. He expanded that thought by asking why the city did not ask for a vote on such a large sum to be spent, nearly 39 million dollars. Furthermore, Hitchcock saw the Spring Valley Water Company as being a sufficient source for water, as it had been for more than forty years, according to the report. Hitchcock's views on the application and the dam are encapsulated by historian Robert Righter, who described it as coming down to whether he was to be loyal to protecting the national park or "to grant water development for beneficial purposes" using the Right of Way Act of 1901. Further into the report, Hitchcock talked about further problems that would arise if San Francisco were granted permission. He reminded them that if they diverted the water flow from the river it would most certainly affect those downstream, which included other townships and the Turlock and Modesto irrigation district, all of which relied heavily on the water. Generally, Secretary Hitchcock believed that his duty to the preservation of the national parks came before granting permission to a dam that seemed unnecessary to him.<sup>17</sup>

San Francisco had given up trying to obtain the permit to build in Hetch Hetchy Valley. After the earthquake and fires in the city in 1906 however, more blame was being put on not having enough water to save it. With this catastrophic natural disaster on their side, leading engineer Marsden Manson sought to pursue the application once again. By 1908, when the application was resubmitted, there was a different interior secretary, James R. Garfield. In 1907, Hitchcock had resigned and had nothing further to say on the Hetch Hetchy issue. Manson was not willing to give up so easily to obtain this permit to build a dam. He went to Washington in 1905 and 1906 to talk to influential members of Roosevelt's cabinet, like Pinchot and Garfield, who became Secretary of the Interior a few years later. In 1907, Garfield was invited to visit California to confer with city leaders about the possibility of reopening the Hetch Hetchy discussion. Most likely because of this, a permit from the interior secretary was granted a mere four days after the application was received. Garfield believed, unlike Hitchcock, that it would, "provide the greatest benefit to the greatest number." This sort of thinking also would have pleased progressives. Others in the Roosevelt cabinet, like Gifford Pinchot, were in agreement with Garfield on the issue. There was a stipulation to this permit that Garfield granted. He authorized building on both Hetch Hetchy and Lake Eleanor, with Lake Eleanor to be taken full advantage of before even considering building in Hetch Hetchy. Congress got involved shortly thereafter with hearings held on Hetch Hetchy later that year. This permit was seen as a tipping point for San Francisco at the time, despite the strict regulations placed on it by Congress.<sup>18</sup>

In 1909 Taft was elected to office and Garfield resigned. The situation then went very differently and not in favor of the city. Taft appointed Richard A. Ballinger as Secretary of the Interior and was immediately bombarded by both sides of the Hetch Hetchy issue. Shortly after Taft took office he, along with Ballinger and others, went to Yosemite to see the park and the



valley itself. Muir thought for sure that he had convinced the secretary to change his predecessor's grant of the permit. Ballinger was not enthused about having to deal with this controversy and decided to commission a study to ease himself into it, according to historian Robert Righter. Going into the matter, he was unsure of his stance and had sided with the previous interior secretary.<sup>19</sup>

With pressure from the preservationists doubling down, he changed his mind around 1910 and began to take action against the Garfield permit. Thus began the infamous "show cause" order issued by Secretary Ballinger in February 1910. This was brought about by a report by some engineers at the U.S. Geological Survey who investigated the valley and found that "San Francisco's argument was weak, Hetch Hetchy Valley was more valuable to the public as a campground, and that the city was already getting an adequate amount of water from the Spring Valley Water Company." Some of the engineers at the city questioned this report. Manson had discovered that some of the report used falsified information and also a conflict of interest for one of the engineers who's report that was also had been employed at one time by the Spring Valley and Bay Cities Water Company. Because of this information, Manson blackmailed Ballinger not to revoke the Garfield permit so that he would not divulge this information. To the disappointment of Muir and the preservationists, Ballinger agreed not to revoke the permit for fear of losing his job. Instead, he decided to order another investigation into the matter, this time by the Advisory Board of Army Engineers. As a result of the weight and pressure of this controversy and his personal feud with Chief Forester Gifford Pinchot, Ballinger resigned from office in 1911.<sup>20</sup>

Due to Ballinger leaving, Taft had to make a decision quickly as to who the next interior secretary would be. Wanting to appease progressives, he chose Walter L. Fisher of Chicago.

Many had assumed he would be in favor of the dam, as he was friends with both Pinchot and Garfield. Unfortunately for the city, he also wanted to become acquainted with the controversy before making any large decisions. That meant the issue would be dragged out. Preservationists were unsure of his position at first, due to his semi-anonymity. At this time, the investigation that Ballinger had issued was still underway. The federal government did not want to pay for the investigation, so as a result the city had to conduct the study itself as well as pay for it. They hired an engineer from the East Coast called John R. Freeman. After over a year of waiting and delaying, Fisher was ready to have a hearing based on the findings of Freeman. Fisher was inquisitive and kept a sense of impartiality but when questioning some who were against the dam he found they had poor arguments and lacked evidence. This did not sit well with the secretary. However, he would still rely on the members of the Advisory Board of Army Engineers for their opinion because of their distance and authority on the issue. Shortly before leaving office in March 1913 he concluded that, despite the favorable review of the Advisory Board, he did not have the authority to issue the permit and must go to congress for approval. However, it was noted later that this step was not necessary and Fisher did in fact have the ability to reapprove the Garfield permit.<sup>21</sup>

After Taft and Fisher left the White House, incoming president Woodrow Wilson and his appointee to Secretary of the Interior Franklin K. Lane were not seeking to prolong this controversy any more than it needed to be. Some even thought that this appointment ~~was simply~~ would resolve the Hetch Hetchy issue quickly, although that is only speculation. Shortly after taking office, Lane went to work right away, calling in the two irrigation districts, Modesto and Turlock, to discuss and settle on an agreement. This attempt at compromise was successful. For obvious reasons, such that Lane was the city of San Francisco's former city attorney during the

beginning of the controversy, he was in favor of the dam and supported it. When the bill was sent to congress, according to Clements, he had “helped to mold Wilson’s views on the subject and mobilize an impressive number of administration leaders to testify in favor of the bill.” After going to congress, the controversy was out of the hands of the interior secretary and left up to those on Capitol Hill to decide the fate of the city of San Francisco.<sup>22</sup>

Another study was done by the city at the federal government’s request to see if Hetch Hetchy Valley was worth pursuing as a potential water source. San Francisco hired John R. Freeman, a notable civil engineer from the East Coast. According to historian Donald C. Jackson, Freeman had no connection or interest in the controversy or even Yosemite National Park before being asked to join Marsden Manson in producing a report. Secretary Ballinger gave the city one year to come up with a report “showing cause” to allow the Garfield permit to persist. This deadline was of no consequence because Ballinger was willing to extend it. However, whenever Freeman returned from a trip out of the country to check on the progress of the report, he found that little to nothing had been done. Jackson describes Freeman as admonishing Manson and criticizing his “lackadaisical work ethic.” After Ballinger resigned and Fisher took his place, he extended the deadline to the end of the year 1911. Freeman wanted to reevaluate the original plan for Hetch Hetchy and Lake Eleanor by starting on the “immediate construction of a large storage reservoir at Hetch Hetchy.”<sup>23</sup>

Because of Manson’s failure to make any progress, Freeman had to ask for another six-month extension, but instead received only three. Again, when Freeman saw the unprepared Manson he had to extend the deadline. However, this was not easy because of Fisher’s impatience. Freeman began to fear that “the Army Engineers will be disappointed, vexed, and possibly prejudiced after City asking for two years delay for investigating.” After a nervous

breakdown, Manson officially left the project and Freeman was on his own to come up with a report that would not only produce hard, scientific facts and statistics, but also win the hearts and minds of the Board to convince them the dam was valid. With a very limited amount of time to work, Freeman finished the report. To his delight, he was successful, and the report was approved by the Board. To the preservationists, this was the final blow to attempt to block the passage of the bill that would allow San Francisco to build in Hetch Hetchy Valley.<sup>24</sup>

Congressional involvement in the Hetch Hetchy Controversy did not officially come until interior secretary James R. Garfield granted a permit to build in Hetch Hetchy Valley in 1908. Because of this approval, it was sent to congress for further study as per the Right of Way Act of 1906. Congressional hearings were held at the end of 1908 and the beginning of 1909 for debate of the issue. The two major characters of either side testifying were Marsden Manson representing San Francisco's interests and Sierra Club secretary and close friend of Muir's, William Colby who represented those against the dam. Starting out, Manson made it clear that the city wanted to be able to take advantage of Lake Eleanor, but primarily Hetch Hetchy Valley. San Francisco's motives became clear during the hearings. The city did not want to settle for anything less than all it wanted. Even though the preservationists had a somewhat compelling argument, they were unprepared for the bureaucracy of Washington. The more challenging opponent to San Francisco was the unexpected arrival and testimony of an attorney from the Spring Valley Water Company. After a brief break for the holidays, the hearings resumed in January, although there was not much else to debate. Most representatives had made up their minds one way or the other and the vote was heavily split. As a result, the chairman decided to make a special investigation to look further into the controversy. This essentially killed the bill as nothing continued as a result.<sup>25</sup>

The second time that the controversy hit a national level was after interior secretary Walter L. Fisher sent it to congress shortly before leaving office in 1913. It was introduced under Senator John E. Raker of California. In the debates in the House, there was strong support from Gifford Pinchot as well as others from the U.S. Geological Survey and other government agencies. The spokesman for the preservationists was Edmund Whitman, who unfortunately had never been to Hetch Hetchy Valley. Once again, those against the dam were not prepared for the bureaucracy of congress. After many spokesmen in favor of the dam including Marsden Manson, the House was a majority in favor of the bill. Robert Righter describes the atmosphere: “The House Public Lands Committee members had congealed to the point that they were almost hostile to nature lovers.” It passed the House 183 to 43 in favor.<sup>26</sup>

When the bill moved to the Senate, most in favor of the dam were confident that there would not be much debate and it could be passed and sent to the president. Those against the dam came to the Senate debate with a little more preparation, having William Kent of California defending their stance. However, this would not work out, as Righter describes Kent as being much more in line with Pinchot-Roosevelt conservationism, rather than Muir’s views. Instead, Muir and the preservationist cause were relying on Robert Underwood Johnson, a prominent journalist from *Century Magazine* to help with publishing brochures, pamphlets and other types of lobbying. Senate debates began by discussing irrigation and the effect that the dam would have on farmers already using the Tuolumne River. Although compelling arguments were made in favor of these people by senators from Idaho and North Dakota, it mostly fell on deaf ears. Advocates for the dam pointed to newspapers in San Francisco and Los Angeles and their headlines regarding letting the dam go up to destroy the water monopoly plaguing the city. By December 6th, the last day, most of the senators debating had already made up their minds about

voting yea or nay, but attempts were made to filibuster the bill by trying to amend it or move the vote to a different day. Eventually, the vote was cast a few minutes before the deadline 43 to 27 in favor with 27 absentee voters.<sup>27</sup>

One of the major problems of the Progressive Era was transitioning out of power the corrupt political machines and bosses who controlled many major cities. San Francisco was no exception. In the mayoral elections of 1903, Democrat James Phelan was voted out and Eugene E. Schmitz of the Union Labor Party was brought in, thanks to the help of political boss Abe Ruef. It was Ruef who also helped orchestrate Schmitz's reelection in 1905 as well. While Schmitz was in office, Ruef was approached by the head of the Bay City Water Company, William S. Tevis, to drop the Hetch Hetchy issue and contract the water to his company instead of the Spring Valley Water Company. So, Schmitz set out to convince the committee in charge of the water that it would a poor decision to continue to try to get the water rights to the Tuolumne River. Interestingly enough, this worked. According to Righter, part of this change was based on interior secretary Hitchcock denying the original application. With the payment of one million dollars to be given to Ruef if successful, it looked as if the scheme would work out. The city and the water company were nearing a deal, but when the Graft Trials took place in early 1906, it all fell through. Many members of the city government were removed from office or forced to resign, including the mayor and sixteen members of the Board of Supervisors, according to historian Ray Taylor. Also included in the trials was Abe Ruef, who was convicted and sent to prison. Overall, this small side-step by the Schmitz administration might have cost the city a second chance at being able to consider Hetch Hetchy as a water source, had it not been for the devastating San Francisco earthquake of April 1906.<sup>28</sup>

Although not directly related to the Hetch Hetchy Controversy, the repercussions of the Great Alaskan Land Fraud did affect who was the interior secretary and potentially saved San Francisco's chance of using the Tuolumne River as a water source. The two main people that this controversy revolved around were Gifford Pinchot and Richard A. Ballinger. Before Ballinger worked as interior secretary, he was living in Washington state and worked at a law firm. When Taft was elected president, Ballinger was chosen over Garfield to become Secretary of the Interior. Pinchot and Ballinger constantly argued and bickered over policies and issues in the government. When Ballinger began to reverse policies set in place by Garfield and Roosevelt, Pinchot and Garfield began to leak classified information to newspapers about Ballinger, according to journalism professor Mark Neuzil. One of Ballinger's subordinates at the law firm in Seattle was Louis Glavis, who was a whistleblower for many large companies. Glavis found some individual claims to coal lands that had been falsified to give a front to a major coal monopoly. He also found that Ballinger was connected to this because of his relationship with the individual who was the front man, whom he had represented as a lawyer. Believing this should be uncovered, Glavis approached Pinchot about the information. In the end, Ballinger was exonerated by Taft and the president also told Pinchot not to become involved in uncovering more. However, more information began to leak about Ballinger, and the controversy blew up even more. As a result of this, a congressional investigation was begun and hearings were held. Ballinger was cleared of the charges, but that did not stop his public image from dropping significantly. Because of this and the growing pressure in the Hetch Hetchy controversy, Ballinger stepped down from office. Along with this, Pinchot was fired by Taft because he became more and more involved in the matter. Overall, this controversy highlights many of the

problems faced in the early part of the Progressive Era. These included muckraking, civil corruption, monopolies, and crackdowns on the political and industrial machines of the time.<sup>29</sup>

With much of the controversy revolving around politics, it is essential to understand the problems and systems during the nineteenth to twentieth century. Large developments in the federal government involving the conservation movement allowed for clarity on some issues and created confusion in others. For instance, the Right of Way Act of 1906 and other recent conservation laws caused many problems for all three administrations, particularly on how they interpreted them. Other matters of contention existed because of the undermining of certain procedures or methods during congressional proceedings and other government affairs. In the controversy, these took the forms of blackmail of government officials, an attempted filibuster, and the bribery of government officials. The Hetch Hetchy controversy was muddled with many underhanded problems, which was representative of the political environment during the Progressive Era.



## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, 5-8.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, 13-26.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, 38-40.

<sup>5</sup> This statute can be found in US Congress. Congressional Record. 55th Cong., 3rd sess., 1899:1121,1149-1155.

<sup>6</sup> General Dam Act can be found in US Congress. Congressional Record. 59th Cong., 1st sess., 1906:386-387.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*, 74, 115, 164-165.

<sup>8</sup> Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 150-153.

<sup>9</sup> Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy, 1908-1913," *Pacific Historical Review* 48, no. 2 (May 1979): 188; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 138-139.

<sup>10</sup> Melinda A. Mueller, "Theodore Roosevelt: Conservationism," in *The Bully Pulpit, Presidential Speeches, and the Shaping of Public Policy*, ed. Jeffrey S. Ashley and Marla J. Jarmer (New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2016), 1-13.

<sup>11</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 69; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 163.

<sup>12</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 63; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 163-164, 168.

<sup>13</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 100; Lewis L. Gould, *The William Howard Taft Presidency* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 1-2, 65-66, 157; Elmo R. Richardson, "The Struggle for the Valley: California's Hetch Hetchy Controversy, 1905-1913," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (September 1959): 253.

<sup>14</sup> Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy," 192; Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 78, 81-82, 100, 125-126.

<sup>15</sup> Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy," 207; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 171; Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 118, 131.

<sup>16</sup> Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy," 183; Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 53.

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 53; Marsden Manson and C.E. Grunsky, *Reports on the Water Supply of San Francisco, California, 1900 to 1908, Inclusive* (San Francisco, CA: Britton and Rey, 1908), 128-132.

<sup>18</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 60-61, 70-79; Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy," 189.

<sup>19</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 83, 93, 96-100.

<sup>20</sup> Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy," 193-201.

---

<sup>21</sup> Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy," 203-206; Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 87, 100-102, 114-118, 120.

<sup>22</sup> Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy," 206-207; Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 118-120.

<sup>23</sup> Donald C. Jackson, "The Engineer as Lobbyist: John R. Freeman and the Hetch Hetchy Dam (1910-1913)," *Environmental History* 21 (April 2016): 293-298.

<sup>24</sup> Donald C. Jackson, "The Engineer as Lobbyist: John R. Freeman and the Hetch Hetchy Dam," 299-308.

<sup>25</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 71-79; More information can be found in US Congress. House. San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir: Hearings held before the Committee on the Public Lands of the House of Representatives. 60th Cong., 2nd sess., January 9, 1909.

<sup>26</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 120-123; Ray W. Taylor, *Hetch Hetchy* (San Francisco: Ricardo J. Orozco, 1926), 91-96.

<sup>27</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 121-131; More information on some of the debates can be found in US Congress. Senate. Congressional Record. 63rd Cong., 1st sess., 1913: 5441,5443-44,5447-5449,5452-5475.

<sup>28</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 55-58.; Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy," 188; Ray W. Taylor, *Hetch Hetchy*, (San Francisco: Ricardo J. Orozco, 1926), 66.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Neuzil and William Kovarik, *Mass Media and Environmental Conflict* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 83-102.

## Chapter 4: Media

---

In Frank Capra's 1939 classic film, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, a political and newspaper boss, Jim Taylor, uses his power of the press to attempt to falter the main character, Jefferson Smith's, home state against him.<sup>1</sup> Although not quite to this extreme, this sort of power was something with which William Randolph Hearst was familiar. He was able to tout his newspapers as "only reporting the facts," yet would leave out the other half of the argument. Overall however, Hearst was an extremely wealthy, influential individual who was able to make his voice heard. This type of media influence was somewhat common during the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth centuries.

There was a shift in the type of reporting done around this time as well. Most of the reporting done during the Hetch Hetchy Controversy took the form known as narrative literary journalism, which is characterized by extensively detailed reporting. It was closely associated with muckraking in which journalists went to great lengths to uncover the truth about a corrupt individual or system. Narrative literary journalism treads the line between muckraking and sensational journalism, which is also commonly known as "yellow journalism." Sensational journalism could be described as making an outlandish claim in an article that may or may not be backed up by evidence. Hearst is best described as being the combination of the two forms, presenting facts but in a way that reflected his own leanings.<sup>2</sup>

During the Progressive Era, there was a call to stop monopolies and corrupt political machines taking away the common person's economic independence and political freedom, according to historian Richard Hofstadter. Progressives sought to expose these types of people through "publicity," better known to others as whistleblowing or muckraking. Towards the end of the era, however, publicity was instead used as "a weapon used by corporations to control

public opinion.” This is reminiscent of some of the major newspaper holders during the Hetch Hetchy Controversy who would print massive amounts of material about what mattered to their cause to sway the public one way or the other. Good examples would be William Randolph Hearst and the *San Francisco Examiner*, or for a time William Underwood Johnson and *The Century Magazine* in New York.<sup>3</sup>

One pioneer of the beneficial use of publicity was Theodore Roosevelt and his anti-monopoly doctrine. When he became president in 1901, Roosevelt took full advantage of using the press strategically. Not everyone agreed that publicity was as good as other approaches, like Roosevelt and some progressives thought. They argued that it could be taken to shifting important news off the front page. *The Outlook Magazine* was edited by Lyman Abbott, a progressive who was in favor of Roosevelt. An article in the editorial was published April 25, 1896 entitled “The Passion For Publicity,” had the reasoning that it as an invasion of privacy, and should not be tolerated. But *Outlook* saw publicity to be necessary in the right forms. The author of the article also described that it should be used “to prepare the way for constructive legislation and ethical change,” but not “to tear down existing institutions for the sake of public entertainment.” In fact, muckraking, when applied in a productive way, is seen as beneficial and a representation of “progressive publicity—exposing business and political corruption,” according to professors Kevin Stoker and Brad L. Rawlins.<sup>4</sup>

Both those who were against building the dam in Hetch Hetchy Valley and those who were for it used the media in an effective way to some degree, but they used different facets of it. Although both sides wrote articles in magazines that fit their leanings, I believe that the park supporters, namely John Muir, took advantage of this much more. He would often write in *Outlook*, criticizing those who dared be against the dam, as well as argue for the use and beauty

of the Valley. Similarly, Robert Underwood Johnson would write in *Century* to defend Hetch Hetchy and others who stood with him on the issue. *Outlook*, for which John Muir wrote frequently, was in favor of the Valley and upheld the values of preservationism. Its editor Lyman Abbott did not agree with conservationists that they should “turn every tree and waterfall into dollars and cents,” according to historian Roderick Nash, who describes *Outlook* as being “one of the chief organs of the Hetch Hetchy campaign.” *Outlook* tailored itself around an “upper-class audience...that viewed the rising ride of industrialism, immigration, and urbanization with some alarm.” This makes sense given who the supporters of preservationism were.<sup>5</sup>

Other magazines like *Poetry* and *Century* were also instrumental in allowing those against the dam to have their voices heard. *Poetry* was created by Harriet Monroe, a female poet based out of Chicago, who heavily supported saving Hetch Hetchy. Having been to the valley herself, Monroe, according to historian Robert Righter, was a devoted to saving the park and even testified before the Senate Committee on Public Lands. She was a supporter of the Sierra Club and suggested an approach for how to combat the people who were pro-city. Monroe thought that describing the beauty of the valley as well as the sanctity of the national parks would be effective. Unfortunately at this time women were unable to vote. Thankfully however, there were some organizations like the General Federation of Women’s Clubs that supported preservation and saving Hetch Hetchy. Despite its membership being split on the issue, the Sierra Club published bulletins with articles written by John Muir and others advocating against the city of San Francisco building a dam. This Sierra Club was not truly the original organization that Muir had founded. After a split in the group, Warren Olney led a faction to support the city, according to Nash. In response the preservationists formed the California Branch of the Society for the Preservation of National Parks.<sup>6</sup>

Besides bulletins and writing in magazines, preservationists took to distributing at least two pamphlets. One, written by the Sierra Club and Appalachian Mountain Club, called *Let All the People Speak and Prevent the Destruction of the Yosemite Park*, talked a great deal about “the history of the issue, reprints of articles and statements opposing the dams, and more.” Another pamphlet was made by Robert Underwood Johnson entitled *Open Letter to the American People*, which took on a semi-religious tone, calling for Americans to stand up against those who favored the dam. Letter campaigns were also something that many preservationists used to flood the offices of local representatives to congress and other governmental offices.<sup>7</sup>

Not many newspapers in California opposed the dam. One of the only negative reports about the passing of the Hetch Hetchy bill in the senate, other than in Merced County, where the Valley lies, appeared in the *Sacramento Bee*. Two days after the bill passed the senate, on December 8th, 1913, the *Bee* reacted with outrage, claiming that the law created

the right to build a dam across the mouth of the Hetch Hetchy Valley, to store 224 billion gallons of the now wasted flood waters of the Tuolumne River, for a water supply for the elites about San Francisco Bay.<sup>8</sup>

It also published a statement from Senator Harry Lane of Oregon:

Farmers of the San Juaquin Valley, in a season of drought, will not be able to get a teacup of water with a lemon squeezer after sufficient water has been piped to San Francisco.<sup>9</sup>

These kinds of remarks indicate that at least some in Sacramento were not necessarily supportive of this bill. It could have been because it was one of the few larger cities in the interior of the state as well as being close to the San Juaquin Valley, which was home to many irrigation farms.

Those in favor of the dam had much more money and resources at their disposal to campaign and lobby for the passage of the Hetch Hetchy bill. Gifford Pinchot specifically was exceptionally skilled at working with the press and according to professor of journalism, Stephen Ponder, he could manipulate journalists on what kind of news they reported. The exponential

expansion of awareness of the Forestry Division in the U.S. Department of Agriculture is a fine example of Pinchot using his resources and abilities to inform and convince the public of federal treatment of conservation. Additionally, Ponder adds that, “no aspect of publicity was more important to Pinchot than the creation of news for commercial newspapers and magazines, which offered what he considered ‘free’ publicity to a wider audience than government publications.” This type of thinking is important to keep in mind when looking at how Pinchot handled the Hetch Hetchy Controversy.<sup>10</sup>

There were plenty of pro-dam supported newspapers in the state of California particularly around Los Angeles and San Francisco. According to Righter, the San Francisco newspapers *Examiner*, *Call*, *Bulletin*, and *Chronicle* all were staunch supporters of the bill to build in Hetch Hetchy. William Randolph Hearst’s *The Examiner* and Michael De Young’s *Chronicle* were especially ruthless muckrakers, not only with Hetch Hetchy, but with anyone who got in their way, whether it be politicians or reporters. Usually when it came to a monopoly like the Spring Valley Water Company these newspapers were extremely critical of the public ownership and water rates, according to Righter. One example of Michael and Charles de Young’s brutal, unrelenting journalism got Charles de Young killed because he went a little too far in one of his articles. [You need to explain what happened to him.] While a local minister was running for mayor, the two brothers were relentless in their negative writing. When the minister found out, he spoke out against them in speeches, calling them extremely derogatory comments. Charles was furious and shot and attempted to kill the minister. The minister’s son was violently enraged, so he shot and killed Charles. However, he was “acquitted on the ‘ground of reasonable cause.’” Nevertheless, his brother Michael continued to write with the same vigorous enthusiasm as

before, earning the *Chronicle* praise for being a “courageous, vindictive, spunky, master-of-insult daily.”<sup>11</sup>

Some individuals would write to popular progressive magazines to discuss the issues. One person in particular is Marsden Manson. He wrote many times to *Collier's*, *World's Work*, and *Twentieth Century Magazine* as well as others about the benefits of the dam and its progressive ideas. In one instance, he described it as being “a struggle between selfish corporate interests and the public welfare.” Overall, *Collier's* was in support of the dam for most of the way, until the very end, when they and many other magazines and newspapers including the *New York Times*, *Outlook*, *Independent*, etc. began printing articles against the dam due to the change in public opinion. [Explain why they changed their position?] Gifford Pinchot was also known to write or lend material for magazine *Collier's* to publish.<sup>12</sup>

William Randolph Hearst was a man and editor unlike any other during his time. In 1887, while he was still in his twenties, he decided to take on his father's failing *San Francisco Examiner*. He wanted to bring it up to more than just a mediocre daily newspaper, but one that was cosmopolitan and up with the times. As a result, in a few short years, Hearst was able to turn around the *Examiner* and it began making large profits fairly quickly. One of the reasons for this growth in sales and readership was Hearst's firm belief in using illustrations to their full advantage. He believed that they “do not simply embellish a page, [they] attract the eye and stimulate the imagination of the lower class and materially aid the comprehension of an unaccustomed reader and...are of particular importance to that class of people.” Along with advocating for enhanced readership, he did not shy away from calling out politicians on either side of the aisle. With Hearst, the paper was “defiantly pro-labor, anti-capital, and antirailroad. In



addition, Hearst fully supported the Democratic Party. Overall, Hearst was not afraid to take charge, do what was necessary to come out on top, and say what he felt needed to be said.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned before, there were many newspapers who favored the city of San Francisco obtaining water rights to be able to have their own municipally owned water supply. This goes back to whenever San Francisco was attempting to search for water rights to purchase along with other cities in the region like Oakland, Sacramento, and Stockton. It was reported in the *Oakland Daily Transcript* in May 1875 that the city would attempt to obtain water from mountain lakes and streams at a moderate cost. The sources of the water from the Contra Costa Water company that Oakland was interested in using were the South Fork of the American River, the North Fork of the Tuolumne river, the Rubicon River and the Blue Lakes.<sup>14</sup>

By the following year, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported on the water supply, saying that there were multiple problems with it. One of major issues included rates of water bills that were ten to twenty times higher than those of other cities with similar systems. San Francisco was considering purchasing the Spring Valley Water Company, which was its supplier at the time. There was a thought to go to the Sierra Nevada mountains for the snow melt there, but that plan was too costly at the time. The writer of the article praised the quality of the water, calling it, “the most certain catchment and grandest store-house of water upon this continent. Their mantle of snow, and the mountain streams flow with the pure and sparkling element.”<sup>15</sup>

A number of articles were published in the weeks leading up to the senate’s vote on the Hetch Hetchy bill. Starting toward the end of November 1913 and going to the day or day after the bill was passed on December 7th, 1913, there were numerous stories and opinions published by a few different newspapers. Starting on November 22, 1913 and also November 29, 1913, there was an attempt by the *Examiner* to get a petition going to send to Washington in favor of

the Act. An editorial published on November 22 described the petition as being a crucial point of the fight for the Hetch Hetchy water supply. Later, on the 29th, after the petitions had been collected, the mayor of San Francisco could be seen going away to Washington with 20,000 of them to deliver to the senate chamber. The front-page article painted a lovely picture of a brief speech by the mayor, followed by eye witnesses who told the mayor their own terrible stories of not having enough water.<sup>16</sup>

The *Examiner* begins to mention about described a “special edition” that will be on the desks of all of the senators during the debates on December 1st, 1913 and claimed the vice president, Thomas Marshall, had changed his mind in favor of Hetch Hetchy. The following day the senate debate began, and the *Examiner* reported undivided support from the state of California, save for telegrams from water users in San Joaquin valley who opposed the measure. The paper stated this was due to a lack of information and that the studies had concluded the dam would supply both San Francisco and the irrigationists with ample water. By December 2nd, the “special edition” of the *Examiner* was released and given to the senators, many of whom, according to the *Examiner* were delighted and found it very informative. The “special edition,” which contains the “facts” about Hetch Hetchy and what was at stake for San Francisco, also included personal quotes from prominent people, both men and women, who supported the dam.<sup>17</sup>

The day after the bill was passed, December 7th, 1913, the *Examiner*, *Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Examiner*, and *Oakland Tribune*, all were delighted and excited that the bill made it to the president’s desk. The front page of the *Examiner* was bursting with cartoons and articles in favor of the bill passing. Also on the front page was a list of prominent people who signed petitions in favor of the dam as well as, ironically enough, members of the Sierra Club who were

there to protest it. “Hearst Papers Fought For San Francisco,” ran one of the headlines on the *Examiner* the day the bill passed, leading to the conclusion that Hearst was more than willing to take credit for “lobbying” the bill and getting it to pass. On the back half of the front page ran a poem that described the purity of the water of Hetch Hetchy:

You may brag of maraschino, anisette and cambertino, you may boast about the brews of Tipperary; you may sing in rhymes iambic of old Burgundy and Lambie, or the luscious wines exported from canary; I have sipped the unctuous sherbet where the Orientals serve it, I have tried all tipples classic, suave Moselle and genial Massic, but a cocktail from Hetch Hetchy is the drink that I love best.<sup>18</sup>

The poem continued on for three more stanzas, describing the richness, pureness, and exquisite quality that Hetch Hetchy water will have. The overall feeling, from the newspapers at least, was a triumphant moment and one when the citizens of San Francisco could finally rest easy, knowing they would not have to deal with the problem of having adequate supplies of water again.<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the controversy, other forms of media beyond newspapers were used to convey the message of the dam from either side. Many times, photographs, political cartoons, poems, pamphlets, petitions, etc. were used in this way. Newspapers and political cartoons were both important and were usually associated with those in favor of the dam, because of the power

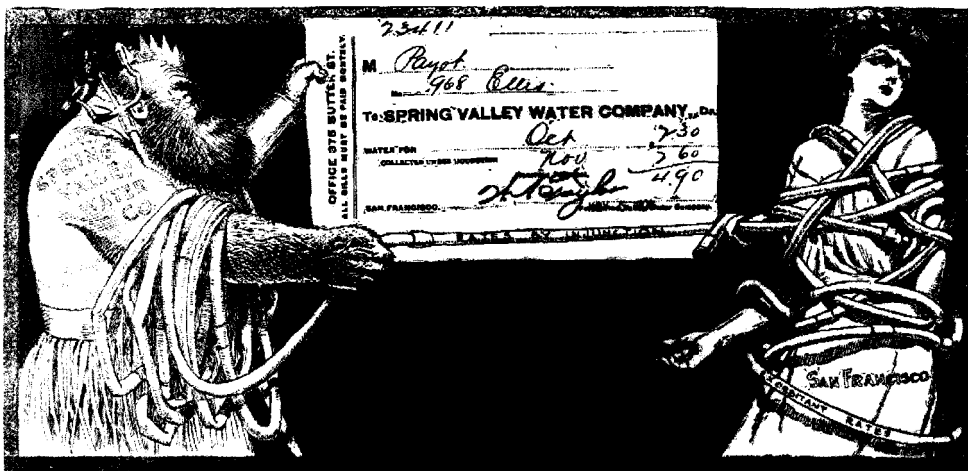


Figure 4. 1 *San Francisco Call*. November 11, 1908.

they held over the press. Hearst was in full support of this, as it helped the reader better understand what was going on in the

article. The *Examiner* and the *Call* make extensive use of these to make their point of being in favor of the dam. One example of this is November 11, 1908 in the *Call* shown in Figure 4.1. It shows the helplessness of the people of San Francisco personified by a woman who is strangled by a large burly, hairy man who is labeled as the Spring Valley Water Co. This is a good representation of what the people must have felt, to be strangled out of their money because of the obscenely high rates that the Spring Valley Water Company was charging the people.<sup>20</sup>

Another prominent examples include when the “Special Edition” of the Examiner was



Figure 4. 2 “Hetch Hetchy Enemy is Defied.” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 3, 1913.

delivered to senators as they went to vote on the Hetch Hetchy Bill in Figure 4.2. The cartoon implies all of the positive outcomes of the newspaper and the Hetch Hetchy Bill. It shows Uncle Sam reading and encouraging President Wilson to read the newspaper as well. Women’s suffrage, prominently featured in the cartoon as well, would have struck a chord with those in support of women’s voting

rights, or so the artist rendered. I believe that Hearst shows with an illustration like this that there will be a large impact that the “Special Edition” *Examiner* will have on the senators and even the nation as a whole. He is certainly confident that this will be the final blow in passing the Hetch Hetchy Bill and allowing the dam in the valley.<sup>21</sup>

Not only were cartoons like this used, but photographs were especially used by the



Figure 4. 3 “Rolph With Examiner-Water Plea Starts East,” *San Francisco Examiner*, November 29, 1913.

message to the senators voting that there were many people who were in favor of the Hetch Hetchy Bill. A promotional photograph was taken and published on the front page as the mayor and his wife went by train to the capital, shown in figure 4.3. There is clear romanticism with the young woman wishing off a man riding on the caboose of the train with a large paper that is labeled as the Hetch Hetchy Petition. In addition to this photograph taken, there was a political cartoon on the following page, describing the effect of the petitions in the capital, shown in figure 4.4. The caption of the cartoon makes the point that if the newspaper overwhelms the capital with those who petitions, then the senators would be compelled vote in favor of all of

*Examiner* and other newspapers to visualize an articles point, like with the devastating earthquake in 1906, but also promoting prominent political figures, like the mayor as an example. On November 29, 1913, petitions were sent with the mayor of San Francisco to Washington D.C., where they were going to be placed in the capitol building in order to convey the

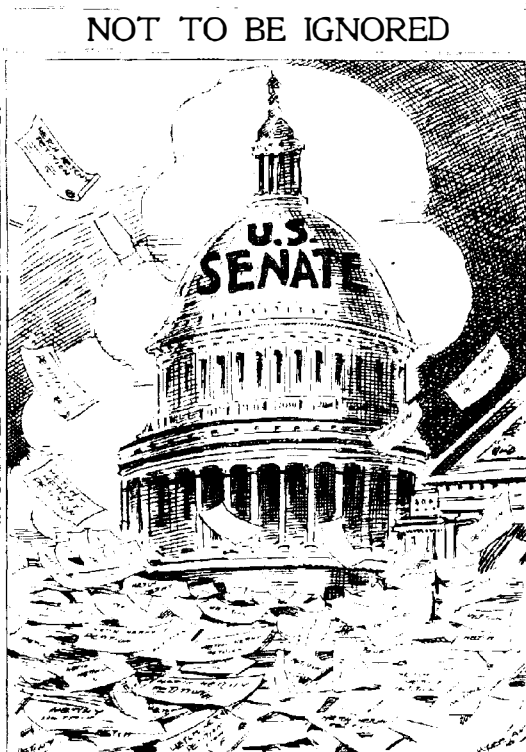


Figure 4. 4 "Rolph With Examiner-Water Plea Starts East." *San Francisco Examiner*. November 29, 1913.

those who signed. This was a lobbying strategy for Hearst to be able to have the Hetch Hetchy Bill passed.<sup>22</sup>

Media and the Hetch Hetchy Controversy go hand in hand, specifically how each side used it to their advantage. Muir and the preservationists against the dam took more of a grassroots approach to the issue using articles in magazines, bulletins, pamphlets, and letters. However, those methods might have cost them because of their ill

preparedness against the other side. San Francisco on the other hand, took advantage of its resources and used its political might and power of the press, through individuals like Hearst, de Young, Pinchot, Manson, and others, to overwhelm the preservationists. Especially through the *Examiner*, *Chronicle*, *Call*, and other newspapers, people in California and all over the country were convinced that San Francisco needed to obtain the water rights to Hetch Hetchy Valley.

## Endnotes

- 
- <sup>1</sup> *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Directed by Frank Capra. Hollywood CA: Columbia Pictures, 1939.
- <sup>2</sup> John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 135-136.
- <sup>3</sup> Kevin Stoker and Brad L. Rawlins, "The 'Light' of Publicity in the Progressive Era: From Searchlight to Flashlight," *Journalism History* 30, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 177-178.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Outlook*, July 1, 1893; "The Passion For Publicity," *The Outlook*, April 25, 1896; Kevin Stoker and Brad L. Rawlins, "The 'Light' of Publicity in the Progressive Era," 178-180.
- <sup>5</sup> Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 164-167; Mark Neuzil and William Kovarik, *Mass Media & Environmental Conflict: America's Green Crusades* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996), 114-116; Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 82-84.
- <sup>6</sup> Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 165-168; Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 85-88.
- <sup>7</sup> Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 164-170.
- <sup>8</sup> "Hetch Hetchy Bill Now Up to President," *Sacramento Bee*, December 8, 1913.
- <sup>9</sup> "Hetch Hetchy Bill Now Up to President," *Sacramento Bee*, December 8, 1913.
- <sup>10</sup> Stephen Ponder, "Federal News Management in the Progressive Era: Gifford Pinchot and the Conservation Crusade," *Journalism History* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 42-44.
- <sup>11</sup> Robert W. Righter, *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*, 34, 36, 40-41, 92, 129.
- <sup>12</sup> Kendrick A. Clements, "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy, 1908-1913," *Pacific Historical Review* 48, no. 2 (May 1979): 193, 199; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 176; Mark Neuzil and William Kovarik, *Mass Media & Environmental Conflict*, 119.
- <sup>13</sup> David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 69-71, 74-75, 79-81.
- <sup>14</sup> "Rivers and Lakes for Sale," *Oakland Daily Transcript*, May 5, 1875.
- <sup>15</sup> "The Water Supply," *Daily Examiner*, May 15, 1876.
- <sup>16</sup> "Back Up the City's Fight For the Hetch Hetchy," Editorial, *San Francisco Examiner*, November 22, 1913; "Rolph With 'Examiner' Water Plea Starts East," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 29, 1913.
- <sup>17</sup> "Marshall for Hetch Hetchy," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 1, 1913; "Water Bill Edition of 'Examiner' Out To-Day," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 2, 1913; "Senate Battle Is Begun For Hetch Hetchy," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 2, 1913; "Praise For Examiner's Edition on Water Bill," *San Francisco Examiner*, December 2, 1913.
- <sup>18</sup> John Northern Hilliard, *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

---

<sup>19</sup> “Hearst Papers Fought For S.F.,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913; Hilliard, John Northern, *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913; “Water Bill Past Both Houses; To President,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913; “Hearst Fought For Years For Bill,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913; “Intense Excitement Pending Vote on the Measure Within Three Minutes of Midnight,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 7, 1913; “Hetch-Hetchy Bill to be Approved,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 8, 1918; “Raker Bill is Passed,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1913; “Senate Passes Hetch Hetchy Bill After Hot and Exciting Debate,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 7, 1913; “Aid of Hearst Newspapers Potent,” *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

<sup>20</sup> *San Francisco Call*, November 11, 1908.

<sup>21</sup> “Hetch Hetchy Enemy is Defied,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 3, 1913.

<sup>22</sup> “Rolph With Examiner-Water Plea Starts East,” *San Francisco Examiner*, November 29, 1913.



## Conclusion

---

The environmental, political, and public ramifications of the Hetch Hetchy Controversy are extremely important to keep in mind, as they still have great importance today. This controversy set the standard for how government land is dealt with, and more specifically how National Parks are treated and how they are to be used. It was an important milestone in shutting down monopolies from the nineteenth century that tried to swindle money from the people of San Francisco. Hetch Hetchy also was a prime example of the benefits and consequences of the Progressive Era.

The field of environmental history has gone through many changes since its inception in the 1960s. Even before then, the conservation movement changed considerably after the 1890s. The conservation movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century was in part due to the movement toward Progressivism in America. The government became involved in the movement when resources began to be limited, especially in forestry and water use. As a result, the government decided to start passing laws that would protect certain areas of land from monopolies and other greedy landowners who would be compelled to mistreat the land. Part of the movement had to deal with how efficiently the conservation of land was being used. The other branch of the conservation movement was related to esthetics or the preservation of land. This meant that these people wanted to keep the land how it was and not use the resources on it all. These two branches became increasing at odds with one another until eventually there was a split over differences between two of the leaders of the movement, Gifford Pinchot and John Muir. Pinchot believed in a utilitarian conservation, whereas Muir, believed in a more preservationist conservation.

Pinchot was a firm believer in the original ideas of the conservation movement involving progressive ideals and preventing greedy monopolies from exploiting the forests, waterways and other land. He was also eventually was on the cabinet of President Theodore Roosevelt and briefly President William Howard Taft as Chief Forester of first the Division of Forestry, then the Forestry Service in 1905. He was understanding of Muir's position on conservation, but held the concern of more people in higher regard than perhaps the nature itself.

John Muir on the other hand strictly believed in conservation as being the preservation of the land and protecting it from any use at all. He was firmly in favor of National Parks and thought that the land should be for everyone to enjoy. Transcendentalism, as Muir believed, was important in nature and in preservation of nature as a whole. He was taught this from an early age as he had studied this while at school, and subsequently inspired him to go out and study nature. Overall, according to biographer of Muir Linnie Marsh Wolfe, Pinchot was more in line with the economic and environmental outcome, but Muir was focused on the beauty of the areas in addition to the other aspects.

The political aspect of the Hetch Hetchy Controversy is integral when looking at it as a whole. When the decision to apply for the Hetch Hetchy dam to be built was reached, many in the city thought it would be a short amount of time for approval and it being built. This was not the case. It would end up taking at least thirteen years for legislation to pass to be able to build the dam in the first place. After this, it would be another fourteen years for the dam to be built and completed. This delay for congressional approval to build the dam was the result of numerous denials the application. Miscommunication and confusion plagued the city until the very end of the controversy in 1913. Furthermore, the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake saved the controversy from dying out by people stretching the truth and the revealing of some backhanded

dealing. This controversy is mired in corruption, backhanded dealings, blackmail, and other complicated political issues. Many times, these problems would be larger than the Hetch Hetchy Controversy and have bigger points.

Media was crucial in how the Hetch Hetchy Controversy was viewed by the public and how others controlled it. The most common form of journalism at the time was known as narrative literary journalism. This is a cross between muckraking and sensational journalism. This was the transition between the two types of journalism, and this allowed for facts to be presented, but in a way that could be twisted to fit what the reader wanted to hear and what the newspaper wanted to publish. Those in favor of the dam, as well as those against it used media in a significant way that was effective.

This included avenues to show what their respective opinions were, like newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, letters, and even photographs and political cartoons. The editorial pages of especially magazines and newspapers were the most common way for people like engineer Marsden Manson and nature enthusiast John Muir to speak to their cause and to convince the rest of the American people one way or the other. Photographs were especially useful in portraying how people saw the controversy. It helped with showing the beauty of the valley and why it should not be dammed, but it also showed the devastation of the 1906 earthquake and how water could have saved the city from burning. However, it was usually who was in control of the media outlets that decided which side of the controversy would stand out. This was part of the reason why preservationists were not able to stop the dam from being built. They did not have enough political resources or influence to sway the vote.

There are many other facets of this controversy that I have not covered in this thesis. Many of these controversies are intertwined with each other and it can be difficult pick out and

summarize one but not another. One example of this is the Great Alaskan Land Fraud with Secretary of the Interior Ballinger. In addition to that, the Pinchot-Ballinger Controversy and feud covered much more than the Hetch Hetchy Controversy and there is need to explore that topic further. I attempted to cover San Francisco public opinion, but other interesting places to delve into would be the national involvement of this controversy. I go into some detail of this, but there is more to be said about this subject. Historian Dayton Duncan described the Hetch Hetchy dam as “the lesser of two goods.”<sup>1</sup> The Hetch Hetchy Controversy was a complicated and interesting dispute that is still discussed and bears significance today. It continues to provide water to the city of San Francisco, but at the cost of 306 feet of water flooding Hetch Hetchy Valley.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, season 1, episode 2, "The Last Refuge (1890-1915)." Directed by Ken Burns. Arlington VA: Public Broadcasting Service, 2009.

## Bibliography

**Primary Sources**

Advisory Board of Army Engineers. *Report on Investigations Relative to Sources of Water Supply to San Francisco and Bay Communities*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913. Accessed March 8, 2017.

Eckart, N. A., and F. E. DeMartini. "BENEFITS ACCRUING FROM THE HETCH HETCHY PROJECT, SAN FRANCISCO WATERSUPPLY." *American Water Works Association* 28, no. 9 (September 1936): 1211-231. Accessed February 27, 2017. JSTOR.

Fisher, Walter. Department of the Interior. *Application for Lake Eleanor and Hetch Hetchy Valley reservoir sites*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913. Accessed through Hathi Trust.

Hetch Hetchy Act of 1913, Public Law 41, 63<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (December 19, 1913).

Manson, Marsden and C. E. Grunsky. *Reports on the water supply of San Francisco, California, 1900 to 1908, inclusive*. San Francisco, CA: Britton and Rey, 1908. Accessed through Hathi Trust.

Muir, John. "Hetch Hetchy Valley." In *My First Summer in the Sierra and Selected Essays*, 307-14. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2011.

O'Shaughnessy, M. M. "THE HETCH HETCHY WATER SUPPLY OF THE CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO." *American Water Works Association* 9, no. 5 (September 1922): 743-65. Accessed February 27, 2017.

San Francisco (Calif.). Board of Supervisors. *In the Matter of the Application of the City And County of San Francisco for Reservoir Rights of Way In Hetch Hetchy Valley And Lake Eleanor, Within the Yosemite National Park: Reply to Objections of the Honorable Secretaries of the Interior And of Commerce And Labor. On Behalf of the City And County of San Francisco.* San Francisco, 1905. Accessed through Hathi Trust.

US Congress. Congressional Record. 55th Cong., 3rd sess., 1899:1121,1149-1155.

US Congress. Congressional Record. 59th Cong., 1st sess., 1906:386-387.

US Congress. House. San Francisco and the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir: Hearings held before the Committee on the Public Lands of the House of Representatives. 60th Cong., 2nd sess., January 9, 1909. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433004203836>.

US Congress. Senate. Congressional Record. 63rd Cong., 1st sess., 1913: 5441,5443-44,5447-5449,5452-5475.

US Geological Survey. *12th Annual Report of the U.S. Geological Survey, 1892*, by J.H. Quinton and J.P. Lippincott, 1892.

## **Newspapers and Magazines**

### **Oakland Daily Transcript**

“Rivers and Lakes for Sale,” *Oakland Daily Transcript*, May 5, 1875.

### **San Francisco Daily Examiner**

“The Water Supply,” *Daily Examiner*, May 15, 1876.

### **Oakland Tribune**

“Efforts to Kill Act Futile,” *Oakland Tribune*, December 7, 1913.

### **Oakland Tribute**

Associated Press, "Hetch Hetchy Bill Favored in Senate," *Oakland Tribute*, December 7, 1913.

### **The Outlook Magazine**

*The Outlook*, July 1, 1893.

"The Passion For Publicity," *The Outlook*, April 25, 1896

### **Sacramento Bee**

"Hetch Hetchy Bill Now Up to President," *Sacramento Bee*, December 8, 1913.

### **Los Angeles Examiner**

"Set San Francisco Free From Monopoly," Editorial, *Los Angeles Examiner*, November 29, 1913.

"Senate Passes Hetch Hetchy Bill After Hot and Exciting Debate," *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

"Aid of Hearst Newspapers Potent," *Los Angeles Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

### **Los Angeles Times**

"Raker Bill is Passed," *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1913.

### **San Francisco Call**

"The Words "Collection Under Injunction" Tell The Story." *San Francisco Call*, November 11, 1908.



**San Francisco Chronicle**

“Hetch-Hetchy Fight is on in Senate,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 1, 1913.

“Hetch-Hetchy Fight On: Bitter Debate Over Bill in Senate,” *San Francisco Chronicle*,  
December 2, 1913.

“Works Batters Hetch-Hetchy Measure,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 3, 1913.

“Hetch-Hetchy is Indorsed by Club,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 3, 1913.

“The Hetch-Hetchy Discussion,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 3, 1913.

“Works Assails Pinchot as a Lobbyist,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 4, 1913.

“Hetch-Hetchy Is Attacked By Church,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 5, 1913.

“Hetch-Hetchy Fight Ends Today,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 6, 1913.

“Intense Excitement Pending Vote on the Measure Within Three Minutes of Midnight,” *San  
Francisco Chronicle*, December 7, 1913.

“Hetch-Hetchy Bill to be Approved,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 8, 1918.

**San Francisco Examiner**

“Back Up the City’s Fight For the Hetch Hetchy,” Editorial, *San Francisco Examiner*, November  
22, 1913.

“Rolph With ‘Examiner’ Water Plea Starts East,” *San Francisco Examiner*, November 29, 1913.

“Hetch Hetchy Petition on Way to Aid in Fight,” *San Francisco Examiner*, November 29, 1913.

“Marshall for Hetch Hetchy,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 1, 1913.

“Water Bill Edition of ‘Examiner’ Out To-Day,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 2, 1913.

“Senate Battle Is Begun For Hetch Hetchy,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 2, 1913.

“Praise For Examiner’s Edition on Water Bill,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 2, 1913.

“Illogical Talks is Made By Works Against Bill,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 3, 1913.

“Hetch Hetchy Enemy is Defied,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 3, 1913.

“Praise is Given to ‘Examiner:’ Great Special Edition Lauded,” *San Francisco Examiner*,  
December 7, 1913.

“Water Bill Past Both Houses; To President,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

“Hearst Fought For Years For Bill,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

“Chorus of Thanksgiving in Washington for City’s Great Victory, Leaders in the Long Fight  
Voice the Feelings of San Francisco,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

“Works Against Bill is Kept Up Until The Last,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

“Williams Ends Game of Delay By Forced Vote,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

“Hearst Papers Fought For S.F.,” *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

Hilliard, John Northern, *San Francisco Examiner*, December 7, 1913.

### **Secondary Sources**

Ashley, Jeffrey S., Marla J. Jarmer, eds. *The Bully Pulpit, Presidential Speeches and the Shaping of Public Policy*. New York, NY: Lexington Books, 2016.

*The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, season 1, episode 2, "The Last Refuge (1890-1915)."

Directed by Ken Burns. Arlington VA: Public Broadcasting Service, 2009.

Clements, Kendrick A. "Politics and the Park: San Francisco's Fight for Hetch Hetchy, 1908-1913." *Pacific Historical Review* 48, no. 2 (May 1979): 185-215.

Clepper, Henry. *Origins of American Conservation*. New York, NY: Ronald Press Company, 1966.

Fradkin, Philip L. *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906: How San Francisco Nearly Destroyed Itself*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005.

Gould, Lewis L. *The Progressive Era*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1974

Gould, Lewis L. *The William Howard Taft Presidency*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2009.

Hartsock, John C. *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000.

Hays, Samuel P. *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Hundley, Norris Jr. *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water 1770's-1990's*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1992.

Ise, John. "Chapter II: Yosemite Park: Hetch Hetchy Dam." In *Our National Park Policy: A Critical History*, 85-96. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins Press, 1961.

- Jackson, Donald C. "The Engineer as Lobbyist: John R. Freeman and the Hetch Hetchy Dam (1910-1913)." *Environmental History* 21 (April 2016): 288-314.
- Koppes, Clayton R. "Efficiency/Equity/Esthetics: Towards a Reinterpretation of American Conservation." *Environmental Review: ER* 11, no. 2 (1987): 127-46.  
doi:10.2307/3984024.
- Koster, Donald N. *Transcendentalism in America*. Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1975.
- Latham, Earl, ed. *The Philosophy and Policies of Woodrow Wilson*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- Meyer, John M. "Gifford Pinchot, John Muir, and the Boundaries of Politics in American Thought." *Polity* 30, no. 2 (1997): 267-84. doi:10.2307/3235219.
- Miller Char. *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism*. Washington: Shearwater Books, 2001.
- Miller, Char. "The Greening of Gifford Pinchot." *Environmental History Review* 16, no. 3 (1992): 1-20. doi:10.2307/3984750.
- Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Directed by Frank Capra. Hollywood CA: Columbia Pictures, 1939.
- Nasaw, David. *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000.
- Nash, Roderick. *The American Environment: Readings in the History of Conservation*. 2nd ed. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1976.
- Nash, Roderick. "9. Use Versus Beauty: The Hetch Hetchy Dam Site." In *The Call of the Wild (1900-1916)*, 85-96. New York, NY: George Braziller, 1970.

- Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 1968.
- Neuzil, Mark and William Kovarik. *Mass Media & Environmental Conflict: America's Green Crusades*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1996.
- Richardson, Elmo R. "The Struggle for the Valley: California's Hetch Hetchy Controversy, 1905-1913." *California Historical Society Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (September 1959): 249-58.
- Righter, Robert W. *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Oravec, Christine. "Conservationism vs. Preservationism: The Public Interest In The Hetch Hetchy Valley Controversy." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70, no. 4 (1984): 444-58.
- Ponder, Stephen. "Federal News Management in the Progressive Era: Gifford Pinchot and the Conservation Crusade." *Journalism History* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1986): 42-48.
- Stewart, James and Jean Arthur. *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Digital. Directed by Frank Capra. Los Angeles: Columbia, 1939.
- Stoker, Kevin, and Brad L. Rawlins. "The "Light" of Publicity in the Progressive Era From Searchlight to Flashlight." *Journalism History* 30, no. 4 (Winter2005 2005): 177-188. *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 5, 2017).
- Taylor, Ray W. *Hetch Hetchy: The Story of San Francisco's Struggle To Provide a Water Supply For Her Future Needs*. San Francisco, CA: Ricardo J. Orozco, 1926.
- Teisch, Jessica. "The Drowning of Big Meadows: Nature's Managers in Progressive-Era California." *Environmental History* 4, no. 1 (January 1999): 32-53.
- The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. Season 1, episode 2, "The Last Refuge (1890-1915)." Directed by Ken Burns. aired September 28, 2009 on Public Broadcasting Service.

White, Richard. "American Environmental History: The Development of a New Historical Field." *Pacific Historical Review* 54, no. 3 (1985): 297-335. doi:10.2307/3639634.

Wolfe, Linnie Marsh. "Part VII: Fruition and Struggle." In *Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir*, 310-45. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947.