

# Preserving American Wilderness: John Muir's Environmental Education and Advocacy

Li-Ru Lu

National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan

In the 19th century, John Muir is the foremost advocate of for the preservation of wilderness in the United States. His achievements rested on having educated his fellow citizens about the intrinsic value of the American wilderness; thus he is recognized as the founder of the American environmental movement. Also, Muir is a prolific nature writer who publishes plenty of influential books about wilderness preservation. This article explores environmental education and wilderness advocacy in Muir's works, offering an investigation of Muir's wilderness ethic. This paper examines how Muir resists the prevailing values of Christian religion and the industrial capitalism in the late 19th century, how he questions the ideology of anthropocentrism, how he expresses the principle of biocentric egalitarianism and the idea of interdependence, and how he presents the essential oneness of all living things. Through these observations, the essay shows that Muir's environmental education and wilderness ethic—founded upon a complete identification with nature and a deep respect for the rights of nature—enabled him to teach a large popular audience the inherent value and enduring nature of wilderness and to appeal to the public awareness for measures to preserve the wilderness environment for early America.

*Keywords:* John Muir, environmental education and advocacy, wilderness ethic

## Prologue

### An Introduction to John Muir

In the 19th century, John Muir (1838-1914) was the foremost spokesman of the protection of the American wilderness. His achievement rested on having educated his fellow citizens about the intrinsic value of the American wilderness. Thus, he was recognized as a wilderness sage and the founder of the American environmental movement<sup>1</sup>. To protect the primitive forests and the wild environment in America, Muir promoted the concept of national park. He was a writer and an activist in the successful effort to establish Yosemite and Sequoia National Park in 1890<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, Muir was the founder of an exceedingly successful conservationist organization, the Sierra Club. In 1892, Muir formed the Sierra Club to defend America's wilderness lands and national treasures<sup>3</sup>.

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Li-Ru Lu, Ph.D., professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Sun Yat-sen University.

<sup>1</sup> In 1965, *Time* magazine affirmed that "the real father of conservation was considered to be John Muir" (Sessions, 1995, p. 171).

<sup>2</sup> The *National Geographic Magazine* described John Muir as "Father of Yosemite National Park, savior of Sequoias, guiding light of the National Park Movement, explorer and mountaineer, naturalist and mystic, adviser to Presidents and gadfly of the Establishment"—such as John Muir, "America's apostle of wilderness" (as cited in Brasher, 1988, pp. vii-viii).

<sup>3</sup> Founding the Sierra Club with 26 friends in 1892 (Lyon, 1996, p. 651), Muir served as its president until his death in 1914. At first, this club principally aimed to preserve California's monuments and natural wonders as well as the features of the Sierra Nevada Mountains (Stewart, 1995, p. 127). Today, the Sierra Club still survives; it now boasts 430,000 members; it has grown into one of the most influential and populous of all environmental groups; and it prides itself in its global environmental mission (Pepper, 1996, p. 217).

A popular and prolific environmental writer, Muir published plenty of influential books: *The Mountains of California* (1894), *Our National Parks* (1901), *Stickeen* (1909), *My First Summer in the Sierra* (1911), *The Yosemite* (1912), *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth* (1913), *Travels in Alaska* (1915), *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf* (1916), *Steep Trails* (1918), *South of Yosemite* (1968), *A Rival of the Yosemite* (1978), *Our Yosemite National Park* (1980), *The Yellowstone National Park* (1986), *The Proposed Yosemite National Park—Treasures and Features* (1986), and so forth<sup>4</sup>. Recording his lifelong relationship with the wild landscape in America, these books expressed Muir's ecological insight and philosophy of national park. The popularity and influence of Muir's environmental writings did not merely anticipate the campaign Muir waged for Federal action to establish a system of national parks and forest reserves, but also converted countless Americans to the preservationist cause.

However, it is noticeable that as of Muir's writings neither the mainstream *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, nor the much-touted, revisionist *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, contain any of Muir's writing. For anyone with more than a passing acquaintance with Muir's work, this exclusion is amazing. Indeed, the anthologies listed above are guilty of excluding a huge body of what might be called "environmental writings" and the works about environmental education. As a result, Muir becomes a figure of major importance in American culture outside of literary history. Challenging the dominant literary canons, which ignore an immense body of environmental writings, this essay will carefully explore Muir's "minority" voice—his environmental education and advocacy.

### **The Readings of John Muir's Environmental Texts**

Despite his prominence as a cultural and historical figure, Muir's status as a writer was ignored by most critics in the 19th and 20th centuries. Norman Foerster, a literary historian, was perhaps the first academic critic to pay serious attention to Muir. In 1923, Foerster's *Nature in American Literature: Studies in the Modern View of Nature* appeared; in this book, Foerster placed Muir squarely in the tradition of America's most important interpreters of nature, including Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-62)<sup>5</sup>; nevertheless, he didn't dig below the surface of Muir's effectiveness as a preservationist writer and a public spokesman for the establishment of American national park.

By the 1980s, two major biographies about Muir, Stephen Fox's (1981) *John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement* and Michael Cohen's (1984) *The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness* appeared. Centering their analysis on an insightful biography of Muir, these two books characterized Muir as one who more or less abandoned Christianity and was sympathetic to Eastern religious system. Generally speaking, most of the critics in the 1980s considered Muir to be a Taoist (or an Eastern mystic). In his influential biography of Muir, Cohen (1984) suggested that Muir was the "Taoist of the [American] West" (p. 120). Another critic, Arne Naess (1995), called "John Muir a Taoist" (p. 79), contending that Muir's notion

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<sup>4</sup> The following abbreviations will be employed throughout this paper to stand for the works of John Muir: MC: *The Mountains of California*; ONP: *Our National Park*; FS: *My First Summer in the Sierra*; Y: *The Yosemite*; SBY: *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*; TA: *Travels in Alaska*; TMW: *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*; ST: *Steep Trails*; SY: *South of Yosemite*; RY: *A Rival of the Yosemite*; OYNP: *Our Yosemite National Park*; and YNP: *The Yellowstone National Park*.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps influenced by Foerster's book, some critics in the mid-20th century—such as William Frederick Bade, Linnie Marsh Wolfe, and Edith Jane Hadley—defined Muir as a romantic and, more specifically, a transcendentalist writer (Branch, 1999, p. 99). They contended that Muir was simply a lesser transcendentalist, dimly mirroring the insight and following the methods of Emerson and Thoreau. As a result, Muir was seen as merely bringing the idea of wilderness to public attention rather than contributing to its evolution.

of non-violence, non-injury, and reverence for life was similar to the central tenets of Taoism. What is more, another critic, Bill Devall (1982), in his essay entitled "John Muir as Deep Ecologist" claimed that "Muir's nature mysticism" belonged in the realm "the eternal Tao that cannot be named or described" (pp. 66-67), arguing that there existed an intimate relationship between Taoism and Deep Ecology movement<sup>6</sup>.

In the 1990s, the "Taoist reading" of Muir gradually disappeared. Instead, most critics began to focus on Muir's religious or spiritual environmentalism. In his famous book, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology*, Max Oelschlaeger (1991) stated that Muir's nature writings appeared "to be more theological than philosophical" (p. 174), and that finding God and celebrating the divine presence in the wilderness, Muir "developed an authentic wilderness theology"<sup>7</sup>(p. 182). Another critic, Sherman Paul (1992), in *For Love of the World* maintained that Muir's books were "essentially an account of vocation, of a spiritual, if not a Christian, calling" (p. 225). Dennis Williams (1993) in his essay entitled "John Muir, Christian Mysticism, and Spiritual Value of Nature" contended that "Muir's preservationist ideology emerged as a natural outflow of his mystical Christianity" (p. 83). Also, Daniel G. Payne (1996) in *Voices in the Wilderness* argued that Muir's writing presented the idea of "pantheistic spiritualism" (p. 85). What is more, Adam M. Sowards (1999), another critic, in his essay entitled "Spiritual Egalitarianism: John Muir's Religious Environmentalism" claimed that Muir was "good and his spirituality" was "inspiring" (p. 123), considering Muir to be the spiritual father of American environmentalism.

On the whole, most of the critics in the 1980s and 1990s interpreted Muir's wilderness thinking through Eastern or Western spiritual traditions. Muir was considered to be an Eastern mystic, or to be an apostle of wilderness who believed in wilderness theology or Christian mysticism or pantheistic spiritualism. True, Muir's idea of wilderness has an affinity with the central tenets of Taoism or Christian mysticism or pantheistic spiritualism. Nevertheless, to think of Muir as a 19th-century wilderness writer who only cared about religious or spiritual environmentalism is to miss the public—especially social and political—perspective of his environmental discourse.

Throughout his life, Muir was a "publicizer" of the inherent worth of the wild in America<sup>8</sup>. Through his environmental writings, he sought to influence people to value the rights of nature in an age eager to exploit natural resources (Gifford, 1996, p. 9). Muir translated his wilderness philosophy into action in the public arena with extraordinary effectiveness. Through composing a number of environmental texts to advocate the importance of wilderness preservation and to promulgate his notion of national park, Muir successfully created several national parks in America. Consequently, he was called "the father of national parks" (Brower, 1988, p. xiii). However, it is amazing that in the 20th century, Muir's wilderness advocacy was ignored by most critics. It is more astonishing that from the late 19th century to the 21st century, most critics pay little attention to Muir's discourse of environmental education. Muir's promulgation of wilderness preservation and his writings about education, in brief, should receive critical attention.

Completely different from the readings of late-20th-century critics who mainly focused their attention on Muir's religious or spiritual environmentalism, this paper will focus their emphases on Muir's effectiveness as

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<sup>6</sup> In *Radical Environmentalism: A Third-World Critique* (1994), Ramachandra Guha vehemently criticized Western thinkers' use of Eastern philosophical traditions—such as Taoism—as the central tenets of Western modern environmentalism (such as Deep Ecology). Such an appropriation, according to Guha, reflected a common underlying structure of discourse in which the exotic, mysterious East merely served as "a vehicle for Western projections" (p. 286).

<sup>7</sup> Oelschlaeger's wilderness theology was rooted in a consciousness of the "sacrality of wild nature" (Oelschlaeger, 1991, p. 177).

<sup>8</sup> In *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1982), Roderick Nash asserted that Muir was "a publicizer of the American wilderness" (p. 123). He was one of the few critics who first recognized Muir's effectiveness as a public spokesman for the wild in America. However, he did not explore Muir's discourse of environmental education in his book.

a preservationist writer whose works express environmental education and advocacy. The aim of this paper, in other words, is to establish Muir as an environmental writer who had connections to an American literary heritage of wilderness advocacy and of environmental education. In this way, this paper hopes to refer the readers interested in the larger, broader, and more comprehensive view to Muir's environmental writings, especially his discourse of wilderness preservation and environmental education.

### **John Muir's Environmental Education and Advocacy**

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Muir was among the first, if not the first, to consider appreciation and protection of the wild in America a public and political issue. He was conscious of a destiny for his writing that went beyond spiritual and religious exercise. Muir's environmental writings, in other words, had an avowed intention to transform the attitudes of the readers, and eventually, the policy of the nation. Scott Slovic's (1992) gauge for measuring today's nature writing in *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing*, "... determining how this literature translates into concrete changes in a reader's attitude and behavior toward the environment" (p. 14), may also be applied to the work John Muir was doing a century and more ago. Through his wilderness education and advocacy, Muir intended to teach his countrymen the essential nature of wilderness, the importance of wilderness preservation, and the appropriate attitude toward nature. Ultimately, he hoped that he could raise the political consciousness of his readers, impelling them to actually recognize the inherent value, not the material value, of wilderness. Muir spoke loudest for the wild in America, recognizing that creating large-scale public awareness was the only hope of saving these areas. In the following sections, the author would like to closely examine the "contents" of Muir's environmental education and advocacy.

#### **The Idea of an Interdependent and Unified Whole**

The idea of oneness, interconnectedness, and interdependence was significant in Muir's wilderness advocacy and environmental education. Maintaining that humankind was only one among many natural kinds existing within an interrelated community of life on earth, Muir valued wilderness as an environment in which the totality of creation existed in undisturbed harmony. In *Steep Trails*, he expressed this important notion: "Indeed, every atom in creation may be said to be acquainted with and married to every other"<sup>9</sup> (ST, p. 7). What these lines stressed was the essential oneness of all living beings. For Muir, nature was one living, pulsing organism<sup>10</sup>. He saw the continuity and interrelatedness of the natural world while his contemporaries regarded nature as something to be dominated, used, or admired only for its most tame, genteel, and passive qualities.

In truth, Muir was looking into the landscape, not just at it. Instead of arguing his ecological theory, Muir in his advocacy writings frequently portrayed the life in the wilderness, where the animals were all part of a harmonious community<sup>11</sup>. In other words, Muir's writings invited individuals to rediscover the natural in itself

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<sup>9</sup> In Muir's vision of the universal interdependence of the natural world, everything was literally alive, continuously interacting with everything else (Gifford, 1993, p. 19).

<sup>10</sup> For Muir, the life world was a seamless, interdependent, and unified living whole in which the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. In other words, the many parts that constituted the world system were internally related. Muir saw a vital connectedness among all things.

<sup>11</sup> In *Steep Trails*, for instance, Muir depicted the interconnected and harmonious life in the wild: Going into the blessed wilderness, the blood of the plants throbbing beneath the life-giving sunshine seems to be heard and felt; plant growth goes on before our eyes .... The deeps of the sky are mottled with singing wings of every color and tone—clouds of brilliant chrysididae dancing and swirling in joyous rhythm, golden barred vespidae, butterflies, grating cicadas and jolly rattling grasshoppers—fairly enameling the light, and shaking all the air into music. (ST, p. 26)

Muir in these lines delineated the beauty, interrelatedness, and harmony in the community of wild nature.

by reconnecting men with the ecological web of which they had forgotten they were a part. The wild nature, indeed, was not a specialized or a unique environment, but typical of the communities of life existing throughout the wilderness. Because everything was connected to everything else, when men interfered, they “could not do any one thing without changing the entire dynamic of the system”<sup>12</sup> (Cohen, 1984, p. 201).

In his environmental education and advocacy, Muir emphasized not only humankind's kinship with other creatures, but also the unity among all living creatures. In *Travels in Alaska*, he employed the image of dewdrop to represent and emphasize a unified vision of the universe:

When we contemplate the whole globe as one great dewdrop, striped and dotted with continents and islands, flying through space with other stars all singing and shining together as one, the whole universe appears as an infinite storm of beauty. (TA, p. 857)

The sense of cosmic unity which Muir conveyed here was one which included himself and all living creatures on earth. Obviously, Muir had realized that humankind was merely one species among many and that the human species was bound with the community of life through interconnected and interdependent relationships.

### **Anti-Anthropocentric Orientation**

In his writings, Muir was consistently critical of the ideology of anthropocentrism in viewing nature. He rejected the arrogant view of his utilitarian contemporaries who saw non-human nature only as natural resources for men's use. In *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, for instance, Muir contended the presumption that nature was created solely for man was not supported by any evidence: “The world, we are told, was made especially for man—a presumption not supported by all the facts” (TMW, p. 160). In effect, Muir rejected many 19th-century assumptions about God, man and nature. Traditionally, Christianity had dispensed with nature gods and all other gods in favor of a single deity with a special interest in one creature, man, the only being on earth who was possessed of an immortal soul (Fox, 1981, p. 51). In addition, Christians also sorted out the rest of creatures in the natural world according to their own tastes. As a result, bears, snakes, and alligators, for instance, were indicted as ugly and ravenous, and useless to man.

However, Muir resisted all such ideas as human contrivances. He insisted that the world did not spin at man's whim. Creation did not belong to a man-like Christian God, but to the impartial force of Nature. In *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, Muir proclaimed, “If a war of the races should occur between wild beasts and Lord Man, I would be tempted to sympathize with the bears” (TMW, p. 155). Here, Muir sided with the animals and professed a kinship even with those animals commonly considered to be dangerous (such as bears), completely rejecting the anthropocentric way in which men tended to look at nature or judge everything by how it served or pleased them.

### **Sense of Modesty and Humility**

In his environmental education writings, the sense of modesty and humility played an important role. Feeling wild plants and animals to be kindred spirits, Muir promulgated the idea of reverence for life and the attitude of humility in his environmental texts. Man, in crowning himself lord of creation, had created an artificial distinction between the “human” and the “wild.” It was a distinction which Muir did not believe

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<sup>12</sup> The economic greed and sheer arrogance of Lord Man, Muir felt, would distort man's sense of his relationship to other living things and would destroy the ecological web of life.

existed<sup>13</sup>. It was man's duty, as it was the wolf's, to provide for himself and to survive as a species. In the interest of that obligation, man had a right to transform his environment. However, it seemed that man alone of all creatures dedicated himself to the repression of other species. In the process of manipulating and transforming his environment, man seemed to have forgotten thoroughly about the rest of creatures in the natural environment.

According to the Christian doctrines, civilized humans had a duty to conquer and control the other species. Nevertheless, Muir rejected such an arrogant view and argued that every creature on the planet had a right to exist—or at least the right to struggle to exist—equal to that of every other creature. In fact, the opposition of culture and nature was a man-made distinction. Civilization and culture stood in the eyes of the materialists for everything which contributed to the welfare of mankind, and the wild “nature was eternally opposed to these ends” (Smith, 1965, p. 143). For Muir, however, wilderness produced the only true beauty, and man seemed to be working to destroy this beauty in the name of culture and progress.

Advocating the attitude of modesty and humility in face of nature, Muir's environmental texts emphasized tremendous respect for all life and a complete identification with the wild nature. Wilderness, as Muir observed in *The Story of My Boy-hood and Youth*, could teach us more lessons than those school lessons and church lessons:

Wildness was ever sounding in our ears, and Nature saw to it that besides school lessons and church lessons some of her own lessons should be learned, perhaps with a view to the time when we should be called to wander in wildness to our heart's content. (SBY, p. 27)

In these lines, Muir attempted to emphasize two “ecological principles.” Firstly, man should accept himself as an equal and humble member of Nature's community. In other words, accepting the limitations of human aspiration, man should cease to believe that he is the center of creation, or is providentially given dominion. Second, man should reject the false and abstract doctrines of Christianity and learn the philosophy directly from the wild nature. In his another book, *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir also stated that man ought to “humbly” try to “trace and learn and enjoy Nature's lessons” (FS, p. 153). For Muir, experiencing the wilderness and wildness did not merely assist men in developing a sense of place, but also could help men cultivate the virtues of modesty and humility.

### **Bio-Centric Egalitarianism**

In Muir's environmental education and wilderness advocacy, the notion of bio-centric equality was highly significant. Muir declared that all creatures were essential to the completeness of the cosmos and that they were equal to each other in *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*:

And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit—the cosmos? The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge. (TMW, p. 161)

This perspective of bio-centric egalitarianism suggested that men were only one of “Nature's animals” or “forest animals” and that the equality of humans and non-human nature (including animals and insects) should not be ignored.

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<sup>13</sup> Muir maintained that humans should respect all human and non-human individuals in their own right as parts of the whole without feeling the need to “set up hierarchies of species with humans at the top” (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 68).

Believing that nature was made for men's material needs—sheep for their clothing, for instance—most of Muir's contemporaries cherished a curious view of the importance of man. However, Muir found human's utilitarian treatment of animals loathsome and abhorrent, repudiating the mistaken conception of nature as existing for men's use. In *The Yellowstone National Park*, he stated:

Nevertheless, again and again, ... the question comes up, "What are rattlesnakes good for?" As if that does not obviously make for the benefit of man had any right to exist .... (YNP, p. 37)

What these lines revealed was men's egotism and arrogance. Muir hoped to see such arrogant and utilitarian view replaced by an egalitarian relationship within the natural world. Men, Muir asserted in *Our National Parks*, were not distinct from—not above—nature, but a part of it with their brother winds, rocks, "elk, deer, wild sheep, bears, cats, and innumerable smaller people" (ONP, p. 16). All were equally admirable.

Simply stated, Muir emphasized the equal worth of all creatures—from the man on the mountain down to the smallest speck. He revolted against the conventional distinction people made between the "higher" and "lower" forms of life (Worster, 1993, p. 195). To Muir, the common distinction between animate and inanimate matter meant nothing; the ranking of "higher" and "lower" creatures was only another human invention; and all creatures were inherently equal<sup>14</sup>.

### The Rights of Nature

In his wilderness-education texts, Muir proposed the prophetic and revolutionary idea that nature had rights. In *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*, he made the radical declaration that alligators, reptiles, and snakes had rights:

How narrow we are selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! How blind to the rights of all the rest of creation! (TMW, p. 148)

In addition to the rights of animals, Muir also introduced the notion that flowers, rocks or water had rights; he believed that plants had sentience (just like men and animals). Muir's environmental advocacy, in effect, aimed to protect the rights of all the rest of creation<sup>15</sup>.

Advocating the idea of the rights of nature, Muir believed that animals, plants and all creatures on earth possessed "human" qualities, such as emotion and spirit. In *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf*, for instance, Muir expressed his belief in the sentience of plants<sup>16</sup>:

They tell us that plants are perishable, soulless creatures, that only man is immortal, etc.; but this, I think, is something that we know very nearly nothing about. Anyhow, this palm was indescribably impressive and told me grander things than I ever got from a human priest. (TMW, p. 146)

In these lines, Muir perceived plants to have worth to have lessons to share, to have souls—the very quality

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Muir's equation of the large and small in nature, of the human and non-human constituted his sense of interconnectedness and interpenetration of self and nature.

<sup>15</sup> Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), Muir's successor in the American conservation movement, espoused the notion—"thinking like a mountain"—in his *A Sand County Almanac* (p. 137). He contended that men had to "think like a mountain" because they should learn to respect and concern the intrinsic rights of non-human life forms—such as mountains—and of life communities or ecosystems (Leopold, 1966, p. 137). However, a generation earlier, Muir's books had vividly reflected the ideas of a person who learned to think like a mountain.

<sup>16</sup> In another passage, Muir also suggested that plants are sentient. Plants are credited with but dim and uncertain sensation and minerals with positively none at all. But why may not even a mineral arrangement of matter be endowed with sensation of a kind that we in our blind exclusive perfection can have no manner of communication with (TMW, p. 161)? This focus on sentience, the capacity to feel pleasure and pain (Heffernan, 1993, p. 110), displayed Muir's prescient ecological insight.

that supposedly separated human from all other creation<sup>17</sup>. Accordingly, men should respect the rights of nature.

For Muir, the basis of respect for nature is to recognize it as a part of the created community to which humans, animals, plants, and even rocks all belonged and to believe that all things and creatures in the natural world had minds, souls, worth, and rights beyond what they could provide for humans. Muir contended that nature must exist, first and foremost, for itself. In *Steep Trails*, he declared this radical concept:

I have never yet happened upon a trace of evidence that seemed to show that any one animal was ever made for another as much as it was made for itself .... (ST, p. 7)

What these lines expressed was the radical notion of “thing-for-itself.” Everything had values. However, civilization, and particularly Christianity with its dualistic separation of people and nature, obscured this truth. In order to reemphasize it, Muir deliberately chose some animals at the bottom of the Christian's hierarchical chain of being. “What good are rattle-snakes for?” he asked rhetorically in his *The Yellowstone National Park*, and then he replied:

Anyhow, they [rattlesnakes] are all, head and tail, good for themselves, and we need not begrudge them their share of life. (YNP, p. 38)

By emphasizing that rattlesnakes had their own inherent (or intrinsic) values and were “good for themselves” (YNP, p. 38), Muir insisted on a respect for the rights of all creation.

### Conclusion

The preservation of the wild landscapes in America was the object of Muir's wilderness advocacy and environmental education. Through the above-mentioned “ingredients” of wilderness education—the idea of an interdependent and unified whole, the orientation of anti-anthropocentrism, the sense of modesty and humility in face of nature, bio-centric egalitarianism, and the notion of the rights of nature, Muir aimed to teach a large popular audience the inherent value and enduring nature of wilderness and to appeal to the “public action” (and public awareness) for measures to preserve the wilderness environment for America.

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<sup>17</sup> In this quoted passage, Muir also indicated that nature preached to him religion more meaningfully than any human ever had. In addition, he suggested that non-human nature could be equal to or even supersede human divinity.



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