

DEIJ & THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

Why is the Environmental Movement So White?

Today's mainstream environmental movement, as we know it, has been heavily influenced by its past – from the grassroots organizing against pollution in the 60's and 70's, which brought us hallmark legislation like the National Environmental Protection Act and the creation of the EPA, to the even earlier conservation movement in the early 1900's, which brought us the National Forest and Parks systems. This past has been colored by explicit racism and domination of white majority interests, a legacy that still impacts who has power in the field.

Studies of the early conservation movement often focus on iconic figures like Teddy Roosevelt, John Muir, and Gifford Pinchot. However, this narrative fails to highlight the influence of Madison Grant on environmental thinking at the time. Grant was instrumental in founding the National Parks System, but he wrote an influential white supremacist book, based on ideas of eugenics. Our heroes Roosevelt and Pinchot supported these ideas and Roosevelt even praised Grant's book. This isn't all that surprising when you realize who the conservation movement was really for: **white men who wanted to protect their recreation areas** (and keep it from other people, such as urban minorities, immigrants, and even the indigenous people who lay generational claim to the land in question).



Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir at Glacier Point, Yosemite National Park, 1903

In the modern environmental movement of the 60's and 70's, concerns about overpopulation were often racist and classist. Leading organizations working to advance environmental regulatory goals, like the Sierra Club, were mostly white and interested in lifting up white environmental interests. **As a result, all the hallmark environmental legislation that created the regulatory framework we depend on today was built without concern for equity or justice.**

To learn more, read [Environmentalism's Racist History](#) by [The New Yorker](#)

Racial Diversity in Environmental Organizations

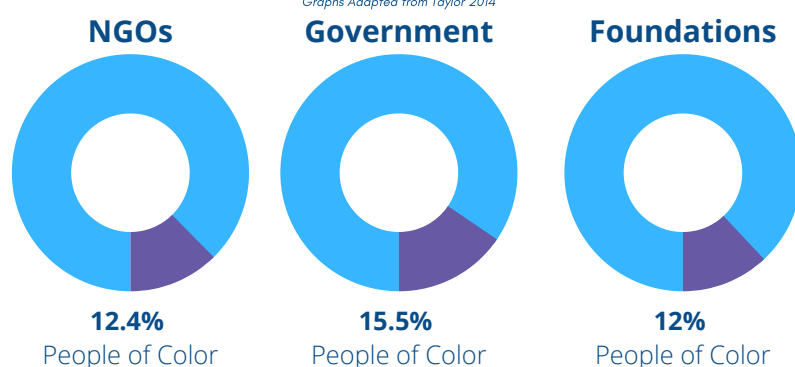
Research tells us that support for the environment and environmental causes are highest among people of color (PoC); they are also the most impacted by environmental problems caused by climate change and pollution.

However, they are not well represented in environmental organizations.

In 2014, almost 300 environmental organizations including non-profits, government agencies, and grant-making foundations were surveyed on the state of diversity. The report found that **PoC make up less than 16% of the environmental workforce** (Figure 1). Also, PoC rarely occupy the most powerful positions in an environmental organization. For example, in the case of environmental NGOs – 22.5% of interns were PoC whereas 4.6% of Board Members were PoC.

Figure 1. Staff Diversity in Environmental Organizations

Graphs Adapted from Taylor 2014



What can you do as an environmental leader of tomorrow?

It is likely that when you leave the Nicholas School, you will become an environmental leader. With that role comes the responsibility to create management solutions that prioritize environmental equity. It can be difficult to know where to start – but don't worry, DICE has you covered. Below you will find some things you can do in any position of your career:

- Start a **DEIJ Task Force / Committee** – research tells us that committees are often the most effective type of initiative for advancing DEIJ principles.
- Talk with your supervisors to **gain leadership buy-in**. It is important to engage all levels of the organization to advance these types of goals.

To learn more about the tools listed above, check out this [Diversity Toolkit](#) by Choose Clean Water Coalition.

RESOURCES

The State of Conservation

- *Diverse Segments of the US Public Underestimate the Environmental Concerns of Minority and Low-Income Americans* by [Pearson et al.](#)
- *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* by [Carolyn Finney](#).

DEIJ in Environmental Organizations

- *The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations* by [Dorceta Taylor](#)
- *Beyond Diversity: A Roadmap to Building an Inclusive Organization* by [Maya A. Beasley](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS AND UPDATES

Gender Violence Training with the Women's Center

- February 25, 11:30am – 1pm
- In GH 1101

Showcasing Diversity in the Workplace Panel

- March 19, 6–8pm
- In LSRC 158

Become a Member of the DICE Leadership Team

- We are now accepting rolling applications!
- Apply [here](#)