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Drying Oasis: Drought and Cultural Ideas of Nature in Santa Barbara, California



A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Sociology

by

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June 2016

The thesis of Andrew Hammond McCumber is approved.

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John Foran, Chair

April 2016

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by

Andrew Hammond McCumber

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## ABSTRACT

Drying Oasis: Drought and Cultural Ideas of Nature in Santa Barbara, California

by

Andrew Hammond McCumber

This thesis looks at the relationship between residents of Santa Barbara, California's cultural ideas of nature, their sense of their city as a place, and their experience of California's recent multi-year drought. Santa Barbara is lauded for its "natural" beauty, though many aspects of the aesthetic associated with "nature" there is the product of cultural preferences and social structure. Multiple years of drought have revealed the ecological contradictions in many Santa Barbarans' definitions of nature, and exacerbated the structural, racialized inequalities on which it depends. I conducted three key informant interviews, with Santa Barbara's water conservation coordinator, the city arborist, and an environmental activist working to ban fracking, respectively, which each illuminated different aspects of Santa Barbara's current cultural-environmental moment. I also interviewed patrons of two parks in Santa Barbara (Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden and Oak Park) about their personal experiences of the drought. I conducted a comparative analysis of the data from the respective parks, which represent contrasting imaginations of nature and attract different demographic populations. One park offers a commodified nature that is produced, distributed, and consumed in the form of an aesthetic, the other offers a comparatively minimalist venue for outdoor recreation. I found that Santa Barbara's

dominant nature aesthetic is, in effect, a taste associated with a privileged class positions. Furthermore, the production of this commodified nature, which is often poorly reflects Santa Barbara's semi-arid climate, depends on a mostly Latino population of laborers. The drought has therefore disproportionately affected Santa Barbara's Latino community, as landscaping work has become increasingly scarce with the declining ecological viability of the wealthy's aesthetic preferences. The plight of this population constitutes a case of environmental injustice, but one that is specifically tied to Santa Barbara's cultural ideas of nature and environmental sensibilities, rather than being a simple direct result of the drought. Those same cultural ideas of nature, particularly the nature/society divide that influences them, do not promote a conscious consideration of the human labor behind much of what qualifies as nature, and thus Santa Barbara residents who are not severely affected by the drought remain largely unaware of how many members of the Latino population are.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In May of 2014, the City of Santa Barbara, California declared a “Stage II Drought,” a designation that brought increased water rates and restrictions on certain types of water use, such as watering lawns during daylight and hosing down pavement (Welsh 2014). The declaration made official city government policy to address what most Santa Barbara residents already were well aware of: the area had gotten abnormally little rainfall in the preceding several years, and the reservoirs were dwindling. The drought in question is far from a Santa Barbara-specific phenomenon, but rather it is the same one that has left all of California and the greater West Coast parched, and caused the whole country to take notice. Over the course of this drought there has been much public commentary about its threat to the California economy, especially the state’s enormous agriculture industry. This has included hand-wringing about the unsustainable water demand of almond trees (Rankin 2014) and other farming practices. Santa Barbara, far from most of the rural areas that make California an agricultural powerhouse, is home to the University of California, Santa Barbara, where I am a graduate student in sociology, and is my hometown. The drought is not primarily experienced here in the form of declining crop yields, but Santa Barbarans are nonetheless feeling its effects in their own ways. The empirical goal of this project is to find out exactly how residents of Santa Barbara are in fact experiencing the drought, and how those experiences vary across the city’s different subpopulations.

Among the advantages I have found in doing ethnographic research in the city in which I live, is that my “field,” so to speak, is the same as the arena of my everyday actions and interactions that happen independent of my work. I am “in the field,” when I ride the bus to work or school, when I chat with my next-door neighbor, and when I go out to dinner. Or rather, any of these settings may transform into and out of my field of research at any given moment, often when I least expect it. I am, and always have been, a Santa Barbara resident, and I have been living through the drought that I now study since long before it became the topic of my master’s thesis. And is there a single topic about which people make more small talk than the weather?

One particularly notable such moment in which my field crept up on me happened in the fall of 2014, the very early stages of this project. A new cocktail bar had opened in downtown Santa Barbara, a short walk from my house, and my partner and I stopped in one afternoon. The two bartenders, a man and a woman, were a couple that had just moved into town from New York City. I made small talk with them and asked them about their move here, how the transition was going, and what they thought of their new home. Back east, New York was in the process of transitioning from hot and humid summer to cold, snowy winter, and the two of them told me they were happy to be in a milder climate. Then the woman said something that stuck with me. Recounting a conversation she had with her partner in excited anticipation of their move, she said “He told me it doesn’t rain there. I laughed, but he said ‘seriously, it never rains there.’”

Now, I should note that in the several months since this interaction I have perceived a significant uptick in the drought’s presence in Santa Barbara’s general collective consciousness, but even this could be confirmation bias, a result of my own increased awareness of references to it. Still, at this point California’s drought was already a national

news item, so it puzzled me how two people could speak so positively about a lack of rainfall here.

This exchange begged questions about the unique qualities of drought compared to other forms of disaster, and where it fits into Santa Barbara's relationship to natural disaster. In *Ecology of Fear*, Mike Davis (1998) explains that early in the growth of Los Angeles, transplants from the East Coast fundamentally misunderstood Southern California's climate, expecting regular, yearly cycles, characterized by "low-intensity, high-frequency" weather events, rather than "high-intensity, low-frequency events." Southern California does not have weather events like New England's rain and snow storms, for example, which are regular enough to be an integral part of the New Englander's sense of place. We have "high-intensity" events (disasters), like the apocalyptic Gap, Tea, and Jesusita wildfires that set Santa Barbara's foothills ablaze in 2008 and 2009. These are infrequent enough that we perceive them as anomalous. Davis's own summary of this difference is that Southern California is "Walden Pond on LSD" (1998). The drought currently affecting Santa Barbara is one such "high intensity, low frequency" event, given its unprecedented severity and duration.

Drought is a unique kind of "high-intensity" event, though, and my conversation with the bartenders illuminates its special qualities. The fires, earthquakes, and floods that Davis also writes about are dramatic and short in duration. They affect communities quickly and unpredictably, leaving them to cope with the immediate aftermath. Drought, though, happens while we are not looking, and by definition takes a period of time to inflict its own significant damage. While the other high-intensity events read as violent interruptions to what we thought to be the status quo of our Southern California home, drought may simply read as the lack of such an interruption. Perhaps the main thing that sets it apart is the

peculiar way it allows people to regard it positively the way my bartender friend did; surely no one would fantasize about their new home by saying “seriously though, every couple years the place burns to the ground.”

Presumably this new Santa Barbara resident with whom I spoke had imagined the city as the embodiment of an Edenic ideal type, as many do. This idealised image often involves a given landscape (the beach is undoubtedly an important part of this vision), an assortment of flora that signify lushness and vitality, and, as expressed so clearly by my bartender friend, sunshine. This last one is as essential to the image of a beachside paradise as it is counterintuitive. After all, when most people picture a tropical paradise, they likely do not picture a rainstorm, yet rain is a necessary prerequisite to the kinds of lush, green plant life that also characterizes this dominant image of “paradise.”

Of course, drought or no, Santa Barbara is not a tropical climate, yet it is often cast in this same mold when imagined, described, or fantasized about. The background picture of the city’s own official website features a line of palm trees that look like they could be taken from the set of a Corona beer ad. This is the heart of the deep contradiction in my exchange with the bartender. This thesis will further explore this contradiction by examining the complex relationship between nature and the general sense of Santa Barbara as a place. Its overarching research question is: What is the relationship between Santa Barbara’s prevailing cultural ideas of nature, its residents’ general sense of the city as a place, and the variegated ways those residents’ have experienced California's drought? To answer this question, I will approach it through three sub-questions contained within it:

- 1. What are the dominant ways that Santa Barbarans imagine, define, and experience nature?** Drawing from a diverse body of theoretical literature on this topic

spanning several disciplines in the humanities and social sciences to inform my analysis of the ethnographic data collected in this process, I interrogate the ways ideas of nature are manifested in Santa Barbara's specific cultural and political-economic context. Of particular interest to me are the local aesthetics of nature, and the processes by which those aesthetics are both rhetorically developed and materially actualized in the city, which brings me to:

- 2. What role do those ideas of nature play in Santa Barbarans' general sense of place?** Or, what implicit understandings and assumptions about Santa Barbara do its dominant ideas of nature, and more specifically its culturally preferred natural aesthetic, engender in its residents? Rather than a simple causal relationship, I treat this as a dialectic between culture and physical environment. Santa Barbarans' sense of their city as a place is undoubtedly related, in large part, to the physical landscape of the area, but residents have modified that landscape, in ways big and small, by producing a plant-based nature aesthetic. This tension between physical reality and culture continually produces and reproduces both ideas of nature and sense of place.
- 3. How does this dialectic of place and ideas of nature impact the way Santa Barbara residents have experienced California's drought?** In this thesis I look at how nature in Santa Barbara constitutes a commodity production process, where an aesthetic is produced, distributed, and consumed through various human enterprises. The ways Santa Barbara residents have experienced the drought vary greatly, but a key material factor in determining their experiences with it is their relationship to the production process of aesthetic, commodified nature. This too is a dialectic. Instead of treating experience of the drought as a dependent variable to be explained by one's relationship to the production process of nature, I examine how these different expe-

riences of the drought, which break down largely along lines of class, have impacted the ongoing development of ideas of nature and place, and vice versa.

As indicated, I will argue that in Santa Barbara, the conception of nature that holds a dominant hegemonic status is that of a commodity produced, distributed, and consumed in a process directly connected to the city's racial and class inequalities. Santa Barbara's landscaping industry and the city Parks and Recreation department, or more specifically the many individual laborers who work for them, carry out the production of commodified nature. This is the human undertaking that actualizes the plant aesthetic so heavily associated with Santa Barbara, to the extent that it may be seen as an inherent quality of the city. The distribution side of this commodity production chain is the particular geographical dissemination of this preferred plant aesthetic. Access to commodified nature is far from equal in Santa Barbara, and is concentrated most heavily in and among the populations who have the capital required to call it forth, and have the financial security required to live in certain nature-rich areas. Buying a house in an area with this access to nature is one form of consumption in this process. Visiting heavily landscaped parks is another. Rather than a simple monetary transaction, it makes more sense to think of consumption of commodified nature in Santa Barbara in terms of the acquisition of a particular form of cultural capital, a la Bourdieu (1986), or the demonstration that one has the "taste" for the culturally preferred aesthetic. This entire process is dependent upon Santa Barbara's structural inequality, from the racialized labor at the production level, to the geographical disparities in the distribution of nature, to the socioeconomic gaps between populations that are positioned to consume nature and those that are not.

Given all of this, I will further argue that the drought has presented a crisis for nature as defined this way. By prompting many Santa Barbara residents to consider the ways the dominant plant aesthetic in the area is dissonant with its climatic and ecological conditions, the drought has made water-intensive commodified nature less economically viable and less uncritically accepted. This has meant visible changes to the physical urban environment of Santa Barbara, and related reexaminations of Santa Barbarans' senses of their city as a place. Importantly, though, the drought has had often overlooked consequences, mediated by this reconsideration of the popular definition of nature as a commodity, and by the city's overarching structural inequality, for the class of Santa Barbarans who labor in the production of commodified nature.

## **II. BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMING**

This thesis draws on, and attempts to contribute to several related literatures. Among these are the theoretical work around the construction of place, the interdisciplinary literature of ecocriticism, and the growing body of empirical work in environmental justice studies and urban political ecology. Here I will give an overview of some of the major contributions to these literatures that have helped to inform the development of my research questions and my analysis. The section will close with a brief overview of some major moments in Santa Barbara's cultural-environmental history.

### ***Sociology in the “Visual Key”***

There is a rich and growing body of theoretical literature that seeks to analyze the ways in which we cognitively order our experience of the physical world, and how, in the process, we invest emotional meaning into different pieces of it. This literature on the “construction of place” is valuable, if not necessary to engage with to study culture and nature, and has witnessed important contributions from a number of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, as well as from scholarly traditions from a number of different countries.

Many foundational texts on place came from various French theorists of the late twentieth century. While these thinkers all addressed the problem of how place is constructed, they did not do so using an entirely consistent vocabulary. Rather, they developed many different individual sets of theoretical terminology, describing place in terms of “heterotopias and utopias” (Foucault 1986), for instance, or “tactics” and “strategies” (de Certeau 1984). Pierre Bourdieu (1977) writes that a set of oppositions (hot versus cold, male versus female, light versus shade, and more) gave a logic to the organization of the indigenous Kabyle houses he observed in his fieldwork in Algeria, and that “the same oppositions are established between the house as a whole and the rest of the universe.” Henri Lefebvre (1992) argued places are understood in terms of “codes” that are dialectically created in the “interaction between ‘subjects’ and their space and surroundings.”

The work of cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan helped to build what is now a more cohesive literature. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, he contrasts place with “space,” writing “place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other,” and “when space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place” (Tuan 1978). In other words, we might say that *places* are created through acknowledgment



and recollection of individual or shared experience in a given spot or area of *space*, which by contrast is vast and open and full of potential. Tuan (1978) considers physical geographical features capable of constituting a place on their own, but also asserts that places may just as easily be created through human action and interaction with the physical world. This dialectical place-making relationship between human agency and intrinsic physical geography is the topic of much ongoing academic discussion. Environmental sociologists have often bemoaned the reluctance of most sociologists to give adequate consideration to the physical environment in their research (Dunlap and Catton 1983; Freudenburg, Frickel, and Gramling 1995; Murphy and Dunlap 2012). In their piece “Beyond the Nature/Society Divide: Learning to Think About a Mountain,” whose title alludes to a famous Aldo Leopold phrase, William Freudenburg, Scott Frickel, and Robert Gramling (1995) demonstrate how the social meanings ascribed to a landscape are undeniably produced at some level by its particular physical qualities, but also how a given landscape, in their case a mountain, carries the potential for any number of different such meanings (ranging from a key source of ore to a popular tourist destination).

In the past several decades, a torrent of cross-disciplinary scholarship has investigated the specific conditions for the dialectical process of place creation, much of it synthesized by Thomas Gieryn in his 2000 review article that argued for “A Space for Place in Sociology.” Gieryn calls on sociologists to “do sociology in a different key - a visual key,” and articulates a model for identifying the creation of place. Some scholars have turned their attention beyond the successful completion of the place-making process to what happens when that process is unsuccessful, incomplete, or interrupted. In a section of his review called “What Place is Not,” Gieryn (2000) says that “space is what place becomes when the unique gathering of things, meanings, and values are sucked out.” Other theorists have used

different terms to describe the same phenomenon. Notably, Edward Relph (1976) argued that capitalist expansion creates mass-produced, homogenous landscapes that are “placeless” in their lack of connection to any meaningful, personal experience. For Relph (1976), whose analysis was notably taken up by historian David Glassberg (2001) to analyze “the connections between Americans’ sense of place and their sense of history,” the epitome of “placelessness” is the ease with which the architects of Disneyland could erect a vapid facade of a cultural landscape that has only the superficial appearance of connection to emplaced personal or social history. For Marc Augé (1995), who uses the term “non-places,” capitalist “supermodernity” disrupts the process of place formation, most notably in locations of consumption like supermarkets and airport terminals. Each of these are undeniably, and often unsettlingly homogenous locations where we nonetheless spend more and more of our time.

Though forces of capitalist accumulation can be seen as obliterating place in this way, they can also be seen as deriving great power from the general control over place. David Harvey (1992), in his influential exposition of postmodernity, argues that shifts in the experience of space and time have changed, on a global scale, the prevailing “structure of feeling,” borrowing Raymond Williams's (1977) famous definition of culture. In the course of his argument, Harvey rejects the notion that either space or time can be understood in static or absolute terms. Instead, he “[insists] ... that we recognize the multiplicity of objective qualities which space and time can express, and the role of human practices in their construction” (Harvey 1992). In a way, this stance echoes Bourdieu’s (1977) call in the opening of *Outline of a Theory of Practice* for social scientists to make two “breaks,” a first one that shifts focus away from the phenomenological to give greater attention to structure, and a second whereby researchers duly consider the role of human agency in creating such

structure. The way we experience space is tied up in the social structures that order our lives, Harvey says, as “spatial practices derive their efficacy in social life only through the structure of social relations within which they come into play” (Harvey 1992). That being the case, control over space becomes an important source and expression of power in these social relations. Space, and more specifically places, can be imbued with power and hierarchy. Place is the site of the struggle for power, as well as where it might be exercised. Harvey (1992) puts this relationship into the nearly chiasmic terms “those who command space can always control the politics of place even though ... it takes control of place to command space in the first instance.”

### ***Defining and Critiquing “Nature”***

This way that place is imbued with power is instrumental in shaping the ways we think about nature. There is a great body of scholarship by authors who have built on these and other foundational texts, and looked to the often messy and contradictory relationship between culture and nature in order to more deeply comprehend the ever-worsening ecological crises of our time (Buell 1996; Glotfelty 1996; White 1996; Davis 1998). The task of much of this work is to complicate the tendency in American culture towards kneejerk, universally positive valuations of the “natural,” by examining how ideas of nature can in fact be bound up in unequal, hierarchical social structures and exclusionary politics. For instance, William O’Brien and Wairimũ Ngarũiya Njambi (2012) use Ken Burns’s acclaimed documentary *The National Parks* as a foil to challenge common narratives around the US National Parks system. O’Brien and Njambi ultimately show how the National Parks have functioned as a place of exclusion, initially overtly by denying entry to some people of color, and more recently through a deeply ingrained culture that has defined parks as places

of escape and leisure reserved for a primarily white, privileged public. Lisa Park and David Pellow (2013) observe the way environmentalism has been leveraged to build support for nativist, anti-immigrant policies in Aspen, Colorado.

These works are descended from decades of scholarship that has unpacked the messy, contradictory definitions of “nature,” a task that has proven as intellectually fruitful as it has been difficult. After all, Raymond Williams, the Marxist literary critic, wrote that “nature is perhaps the most complex word in the English language” (1980). More than just a complex word, though, it is a complex and often abstract concept that carries immense emotional weight to many. It has long been a rallying cry for environmentalists. Frequently, when people talk about “nature,” they refer to something similar to “wilderness,” as it is critiqued by historian William Cronon in “The Trouble With Wilderness.” A central point in Cronon's critique is that “wilderness” is synonymous with that which is fundamentally external to society, beyond the scope of human activity. A second assumption guiding popular ideas of “wilderness” is that it has a health-giving or therapeutic property, amounting to a sort of “cathedral not in some petty human building but in God’s own creation” (Cronon 1996). The basis of Cronon’s critique of wilderness can be brought to an analysis of urban nature as well. In *Paradise Transplanted*, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2014) writes that in Southern California, “the quest for the good life ... has generally included palms, orange trees, and lawns.” Hondagneu-Sotelo (2014) also describes urban nature as a commodity, echoing Raymond Williams (1980), who argued that nature is consumed not just as material resources, but also as scenery.

The analytical perspective on nature in this thesis draws from a wide body of literature including scholars and writers from diverse disciplines and backgrounds, each of whose work concerns the confluence of culture and nature. Much of this falls within the

interdisciplinary field of ecocriticism, for which works by the aforementioned Raymond Williams (1973, 1980) such as his book *The Country and the City*, and his essay “Ideas of Nature,” along with Leo Marx’s (1964) classic piece of literary criticism *The Machine in the Garden* became seminal texts. Both Marx’s (1964) analysis of the “pastoral ideal,” or a “jejune expression of a national preference” for idealizing nature while simultaneously clinging to incompatible commitments to urban industrialism, and Williams’s (1980) observation that, despite residing in the plant kingdom, a carefully cultivated and manicured hedge is hardly “natural” in the sense of the word most people have, are still highly influential in contemporary scholarship on nature and culture. These early works laid the foundation for an ecocritical lens that allows the sociologist to transcend the understanding of “landscape” that so many social scientists bring to their work, as a “primordial mise en scene within which social action occurs” (Bell 1993).

Since the early ecocritical work that often focused on Romantic literature or famous figures in American radical conservationism like John Muir, Rachel Carson, and Edward Abbey, the field has expanded to consider a vast array of topics in which culture intersects with nature, often in places where such an intersection was rarely noticed or considered before. For example, the edited volume *Wild Things: Children’s Culture and Ecocriticism* (Dobrin and Kidd 2004) features work that examines how the media we are exposed to as children, from television shows to Dr. Seuss books to Disney Movies, have a profound influence on the ideas we develop about nature. More recently, a budding literature spearheaded by the work of Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and others has applied the framework of queer theory to the study of culture and the environment. Various pieces in the anthology *Queer Ecologies* (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010) discuss how our ideas about sexuality inform the way we conceive of and understand natural landscapes, and

vice versa. Ecocriticism has shown us how our cultural understandings of nature may be imbued with any number of different particularities of our social organizations.

Many recent scholars have renewed decades-old efforts to change the way we think about environmental issues, by casting them specifically as social and cultural ones. Much of this scholarship accepts the broad, interdisciplinary classification of “environmental humanities,” though work that contributes to this field is hardly confined to the humanities as they are typically defined. Many contemporary scholars now favor this term over “ecocriticism,” since the study of the intersection of culture and nature continues to transcend the specific brand of close literary reading at the origin of twentieth-century ecocriticism (Wilke 2015). One of the “four problems” in the modern environmental humanities identified by Astrida Neimanis, Cecilia Åsberg, and Johan Herdén (2015) in their review article is “compartmentalization of ‘the environment’ from other spheres of concern - both in practical and ontological terms.” David Grazian (2015) engages with this prevailing cultural tendency to tenuously define nature as external to human society in his ethnographic work on the spectacle of an idealized “nature” or “wildness” in American zoos.

A lively academic debate within the environmental humanities’ project of reckoning with this traditional “compartmentalization” has grown out of the proposal of a new term to refer to our current geological epoch: the “anthropocene.” This term alone, meant to imply that the dominant agent affecting global material processes and change is now human activity, is helpful in bringing focus to the social, human elements of environmental problems. For many scholars, though, the term lacks the necessary nuance to adequately capture the relationship between society and environmental affairs. Eileen Crist (2013), for example, asks whether discourse around the anthropocene artificially forces all of humanity into the role of a “homogenized protagonist named ‘the human enterprise’ undefended for

either its singularity (are all humans involved in one enterprise?) or its insularity (are nonhumans excluded from the enterprise?).” These new topics are all extensions of the same central questions posed by the early authors of the ecocritical canon, aimed at deepening our understanding of the connections between culture and the physical environment. They are an extension of the continuing project of reconceptualizing nature.

### ***Environmental Justice***

Environmental sociologists are increasingly considering questions regarding the explicit links between environmental issues and social inequality (Pellow and Nyseth Brehm 2013). This rise of the interdisciplinary, but undeniably sociological field of environmental justice studies (EJ) has produced a huge volume of scholarship that investigates the unequal distribution of environmental problems, and of vulnerability to ecological crisis and natural disaster. The core principles behind the EJ literature are that (1) marginalized communities have been disproportionately affected by a host of environmental maladies, and (2) the solution to this situation lies in, as “the principle that ‘all people and communities are entitled to equal protection of environmental and public health laws and regulations’” (Mohai et al. 2009, quoting Robert Bullard). Much EJ scholarship has centered on environmental racism, the phenomenon whereby people of color are systematically burdened by environmental issues. EJ scholars have considered both material forms of environmental racism, such as housing discrimination forcing people of color into neighborhoods vulnerable to harm from ecological hazards like pollution or disaster (Bullard et al. 1994), as well as discursive, cultural forms that culturally marginalise them in ways that legitimize the environmental violence they are subject to (Mills 2001). Scholars have also pointed to other

social categorizations besides race as important factors in environmental justice issues, such as class (Mohai 2007; Mohai and Saha 2006; Nixon 2011) and gender (Bell 2013).

The theoretical basis of EJ studies has been informed by Ulrich Beck's (1992) argument that modern societies have systematically courted exponentially increasing levels of risk through various types of development. Many of the engineered disasters and crises of this kind have come from various extractive industries that have harmful ecological effects on the areas in which they operate, exposing workers and residents to dangerous and exploitative conditions. A wealth of recent scholarship has examined such industries, as well as public resistance to them, ranging from coal (Bell 2013; Scott 2010), to logging (Sarathy 2008), to uranium mining (Voyles 2015).

Of particular relevance to this thesis is the work within environmental justice studies that has given special attention to the social dynamics of urban nature. Recently scholars have focused more and more on the seemingly contradictory relationship between cities and nature. This is the subject of the emerging literature on "urban political ecology," which Ann Rademacher (2015) says "presents ethnographers with dynamic socio-natural processes through which human and nonhuman biophysical change can be observed, evaluated, and problematized." Whereas cities have typically been conceived of as outside of, or even antithetical to nature, urban political ecology counters by affirming that "the urban condition [is] a fundamentally socio-environmental process" (Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2014). This means both researching the massive, complex dependency on material resources that makes large, urban settlement possible, like Andrew Ross (2011) has in his inquiry into the possibilities for (or perhaps impossibility of) sustainability in Phoenix, Arizona, as well as examining the places where the idealized nature that is supposedly antithetical to the urban nonetheless makes its way into our cities (Darling 2014; Gandy 2014)



This thesis follows in the footsteps of EJ scholars by considering the oil industry's place within Santa Barbara, specifically the contentious and contradictory arena of public opinion around hydraulic fracturing, which is considered by many a threat to groundwater reserves in the Santa Barbara area. My discussion of this issue builds on empirical research by other environmental sociologists who have previously analyzed the politics of oil extraction in this area (Freudenburg and Gramling 1993; Molotch 1970). Also, by examining the ways Santa Barbara's drought has differently affected various sections of the population, this thesis proceeds from a common sense principle of environmental justice, that when natural disaster strikes, marginalized communities are almost certain to be hit the hardest.

Santa Barbara is a prime location to take up this work. It could currently be considered ground zero for the dialectical tension between physical setting and socio-cultural activity in the arena of place-making, for the common dualistic conception that draws a strict but artificial line between society and the natural world, and for the relationship between ecological crisis and cultural ideas of nature. Echoing Mike Davis's (1998) interrogation of Los Angeles's unique relationship to disaster and environmental issues, Jenny Price (2006) argues that LA, with its complex web of interaction between urban life and the natural world, ought to be a hub for nature writers the same way Missoula, Montana and Boulder, Colorado are for their perceived closeness to typically "wild" nature. Santa Barbara's socio-natural history mirrors in many ways that of Los Angeles, which sits just 90 miles south down highway 101, yet popular conceptions of Santa Barbara may be closer to those of Boulder and Missoula than LA, which Price (2006) notes is commonly thought of as devoid of nature. For these reasons Santa Barbara has arguably an even richer and more contradictory relationship to nature than any of these cities, a relationship that is noticeably heightened and intensified by the current drought. I am not the first sociologist to take up an

ecocritical analysis of Santa Barbara's "nature" (Dryden 2012), but, this thesis will build on previous work focused on the area, as well as all of the other relevant literature discussed here to take a more in-depth look at Santa Barbara's cultural relationship to nature than previous scholarship has. In doing so it will focus on a specific historical moment, namely the drought.

### ***A Few Key Moments of Santa Barbara's Cultural-Environmental History***

The often uneasy relationship between Santa Barbara as a human settlement and the broader ecology of the area has centuries of historical context. The dialectical relationship between Santa Barbara's biophysical setting and human activity and agency that creates "place" is as old as human habitation in the area. Nonetheless, some of the most dramatic human-led overhauls of the Santa Barbara landscape occurred from the colonial and early postcolonial period onward. As far as the built world goes, the colonial period's influence on modern day Santa Barbara is easily visible and even a source of pride for many. Aside from the Mission and Presidio, colonial era edifices preserved as museums and tourist destinations, Santa Barbara's characteristic architectural style is "Spanish Colonial Revival," with its trademark white-washed walls and red tile roofs.

This period left a striking legacy on the biophysical features of the area as well, though, as landscapes dominated by oak and sage were converted to cattle grazing land. It is a vital piece of context to understanding the social aspects of the area's current drought conditions. During the Spanish colonial years of California history, settlers began a cattle grazing industry in the Santa Barbara area that would thrive into the 1800s. This would prove to be a disastrously unsustainable use of land in semiarid California, as a lack of rainfall would expose the incompatibility of some human enterprises with the local climate. Walter A.

Tompkins, in his 1960 history of the Dos Pueblos Ranch, now in Goleta, adjacent to the Santa Barbara city limits, details how the ranch's cattle industry was devastated by the "great drought of 1864." Over several dry years, the area's "waterfalls ... fell silent," and its "green mesas fronting the seaboard began to turn sear" (Tompkins 1960). In the ranch's peak years prior to the drought it had more cattle than its owner could count, but this drought left cattle suffering from malnutrition and retreating "farther into the canyons, eating oak leaves, chaparral, anything they could find" (Tompkins 1960). The collapse of the local cattle industry culminated when "the beef market hit zero," with "the Big Matanza - the wholesale slaughter of every living bovine animal that could be rounded up along the Goleta Valley." This mass slaughter took place on the beach in what is now one of Santa Barbara's most upscale regions.

As the city urbanized in the first few decades of the twentieth century, Santa Barbara's cultural-environmental landscape changed further. It was in this period that Santa Barbara's plant aesthetic rapidly changed and took form. One particular individual, Francesco Franceschi, is credited with having a massive influence on the city through landscape architecture. Franceschi is credited with introducing hundreds of different varieties of plants in the decades after his 1893 arrival in Santa Barbara (Beittel 1984). The prolific horticulturalist aimed to create a visual spectacle to rival "the far famed avenues of Hyères (southern France), of Algiers, [and] Rio de Janeiro" (Franceschi, quoted in Beittel 1984). Franceschi's work served to manufacture Santa Barbara's aesthetic landscape with a level of care and intention perhaps unmatched elsewhere. Will Beittel's (1984) book on Franceschi, published by the Santa Barbara County Horticultural Society, mentions that he found Santa Barbara an ideal location for introducing new plants, both for its versatile climate and its already visually appealing setting between the beach and the Santa Ynez Mountains. Santa

Barbara as a physical location thus provided the potential for the sociocultural “place” that has been erected there, but it remains a manifestation, through management of plant life, of cultural desires that transcend the local climate or ecology. Indeed, as Beittel (1984) writes, Franceschi labored to “a thoroughly systematic and intensive work of introducing to Santa Barbara all sorts of economic or ornamental plants from the countries of the world.”

Both of these periods in Santa Barbara’s history involved significant attempts at commanding and controlling the physical environment, one doing so in a way that valued and commodified the land for its material, economic potential, and one that valued its aesthetic potential. Both of these impulses, the obvious and inherent tensions between them notwithstanding, have continued side by side in Santa Barbara in the decades that have followed. This tension in Santa Barbara’s cultural attitude towards the environment came to a head in 1969 when an oil drilling platform off the coast of Santa Barbara blew out. A “massive eruption” would eventually “cover the entire city coastline (as well as much of Ventura County’s and greater Santa Barbara County’s coastlines) with a thick coat of crude oil” (Molotch 1970). This was a shock to a city that had tolerated oil drilling off its shores but nonetheless had substantial investment in its pristine coastline and natural aesthetic. The oil spill would lead to a mobilization of environmentalist action in Santa Barbara. Harvey Molotch (1970) notes the formation of a “community organization” headed by a “former State Senator and local corporate executive ... called ‘GOO’ (Get Oil Out!) which took a militant stand against any and all oil activity in the Channel.” The spill also catalyzed the formation of UC Santa Barbara’s Environmental Studies Program (UCSB Environmental Studies n.d.). It was even the inspiration for the first “Earth Day” (Anon 2014). Both the oil industry and environmental organizations maintain significant presences in Santa Barbara today.

My analysis of the drought in Santa Barbara will consider this relevant historical context around local environmental issues and the culture of nature. We will see that this current state of ecological crisis has created unique conditions shaping the ongoing development of a general environmental ethos for the city. I will look carefully at how the drought has exposed longstanding tensions described here between the valuation of Santa Barbara for an aesthetic, and the valuation of it for its latent potential for the extraction of material wealth.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This thesis relies on data from interview research conducted in Santa Barbara between June and November 2015. The subjects of these interviews fell into two categories: three key informants with expertise on a particular aspect of the drought's impact on Santa Barbara, and people I came across in the course of ethnographic fieldwork at two parks in the city. I used the interviews with my three informants for broad analysis of Santa Barbara's socio-cultural relationship to nature and the drought's effects on that relationship. Each of these informants offered insight into at least one part of the three-part formulation of my research question outlined in the introduction, and provided context for an analysis of the interviews from my fieldwork. These latter interviews were used to gauge the effects of the drought on individual Santa Barbarans' lives, with a sensitivity towards the role nature plays in these effects.

The first of my three key informants was Madeline Ward, the City of Santa Barbara's Acting Water Conservation Coordinator. Ward heads Santa Barbara's Water Conservation Program, which is umbrellaed by the Water Resources Division of the city's Public Works Department. Her program has coordinated various campaigns to reduce the city's overall

water use, ranging from large scale replacement of older, water-intensive household appliances to awareness/marketing campaigns aimed at changing individual behaviors and the culture around water use. I stopped by Santa Barbara's Public Works office in June 2015 to ask for any information available on water use in Santa Barbara. There I was referred to Madeline Ward on the office's internal telephone system, and Ward agreed to schedule an interview with me the next week. We met on June 22 in one of the city's conference rooms. Our interview focused on geographical and social distributions of water use in Santa Barbara, as well as her program's efforts to further water conservation in the area, and provided valuable insight into the general state of Santa Barbara during the drought, from the perspective of the local government. This interview helped clarify both Santa Barbarans' dominant cultural ideas of nature, as well as how many residents experienced the drought.

Timothy Downey, another key informant, also works for the city, but in the Parks and Recreation Department. Downey oversees the management of countless street and park trees in his job as the city's Urban Forest Superintendent, or arborist. This is an influential position, as far as the city's natural aesthetic goes, as Downey is essentially responsible for curating and maintaining a large portion of the interactions Santa Barbara residents have with plant life within urban Santa Barbara. I had originally met Downey a few months prior to our June 23 interview, when I emailed the Parks department requesting information on the history of palm trees in Santa Barbara for a different project. I was referred to Downey, who allowed me to visit his office on Santa Barbara's east side where he had books and documents detailing the history of different species of trees in the area. I followed up with him at the end of spring in 2015 to set up an interview for this project. This interview gave an inside look into the massive care and undertaking that goes into major aspects of Santa Barbarans' experience with nature. Besides explaining the bureaucratic details of Santa

Barbara's tree management, Downey answered my questions about how the drought has impacted his work, and how it has consequently impacted Santa Barbara's urban tree life. I used this interview to get at part two of my research question, the relationship between the aesthetics of nature, over which Downey has unrivaled control, and Santa Barbarans' sense of place.

My last key informant was Katie Davis, an environmental activist with an organization called the Santa Barbara County Water Guardians. This group spearheaded a campaign to ban certain extreme methods of oil extraction (commonly known as "fracking") in Santa Barbara County through a fall 2014 ballot initiative. The measure was defeated at the polls. As their organization's moniker implies, the Water Guardians' campaign sought to make voters conscious of a connection between oil extraction and water issues. The drought was well underway in the fall of 2014. I was conscious of the Water Guardians, having encountered them around town during the canvassing/petitioning phase of their campaign, and having closely followed the resulting initiative, Measure P. I reached out to the Water Guardians in October 2015 at the contact email listed on their website and explained my project. I asked if someone from their organization was available for an interview, and was referred to Davis, who agreed to meet me at the Calle Real Shopping Center in Goleta on October 12. In our interview we discussed the tensions between the city of Santa Barbara's various, contradictory identities with respect to nature, that nonetheless exist side by side. These include being both a symbol of and sometimes-mecca for American environmentalism, and a longtime haven for the oil industry. By talking to Davis I got a snapshot of the state of environmentalism in Santa Barbara in the specific context of the drought. This interview further grounded my analysis of the first part of my research

question, about ideas of nature, with important context about the role that those ideas play in Santa Barbarans' sensibilities regarding environmental issues.

As for my ethnographic fieldwork, I considered city parks methodologically useful sites for two distinct reasons. The first, and more practical reason was that parks are quintessential gathering points for urban populations. In order to analyze the effects of the drought on individual residents' lives, I needed a public place to gather a sample of interview subjects. These parks provided just that, in a way that was specifically useful for the goal of making sound generalizations and conclusions about the broader population. Getting a sample of interviewees that would be truly representative of the entirety of greater Santa Barbara would have been difficult, if not nearly impossible for this project, so by using a sample drawn from a smaller subpopulation (namely patrons of a particular park), I was able to extrapolate based on the positions of the parks themselves within Santa Barbara's social and cultural world. The two parks, Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden and Oak Park, are in different parts of town and serve different communities. This meant they provided two populations that varied in their racial and social class make-ups. It also meant my interviewees had a range of different relationships to nature, which came out both in their personal accounts of the drought and in their interactions with nature vis a vis the parks where the interviews took place. This brings me to the second methodological virtue of parks in this project, which is the fact that they present a venue for residents' interaction with and, in some cases, consumption of nature. In this respect, the parks themselves became points of analysis, and robust sources of data regarding the varying social orientations to nature that exist within Santa Barbara.

In contrasting the two parks I do not intend to present the populations of parkgoers found at each as strictly dichotomous or mutually exclusive. After all, I, myself, am evidence that



residents may frequent both parks. Nonetheless there are important differences to consider in terms of the parkgoers typically found at either on any given day. Also, in considering the parks themselves as social and cultural entities connected to the city's relationship to nature, it makes sense to consider them as distinct from each other and to contrast the experiences of nature they provide patrons.

The interviews I conducted with parkgoers were centered on their experiences of the drought in Santa Barbara. All of these proceeded from general inquiries about what the interviewee had heard about the drought or whether it had affected them in any particular way. More specific questions I asked some of these interviewees had to do with whether they thought a particular demographic of people had been disproportionately affected by the drought, whether they thought Santa Barbara had been affected differently than other areas in California for any reason, and what changes they had noticed around town as a result of the drought. Some retained a survey-esque style through to the end, as respondents gave brief but thoughtful answers, while others evolved into broader conversations on the topic, and ultimately more closely resembled the longer interviews I conducted with my three key informants, Madeline Ward, Timothy Downey, and Katie Davis. These latter interviews strayed from the questions I came prepared with, as I asked follow-up questions that related to their specific cases.

I saw Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden, my first site for fieldwork, as a valuable place to view the many complex facets of Santa Barbarans' cognitive experience of the drought, because of the symbolic weight it carried regarding the city's relationship to nature. Alice Keck is in downtown Santa Barbara, a few blocks from the main drag State Street. The park is a landscaped array of plants and trees from around the world, which surround a human-made system of streams and a pond. I went to Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden countless

times over the course of roughly a month before actually interviewing anyone. It took this long for me to build up the courage to conduct these kinds of interviews. I went to the park several days a week during this period. At first, before I had built up any of the resolve and determination that would eventually get me over this hang-up, I would not even bring my voice recorder with me, but rather bring my lunch or a book and simply people watch. This was on purpose, as I saw it important to just observe, take notes, and get a feel for the park, the different kinds of people who attended at different times, and the kinds of activities they engaged in when they came. Eventually, though, I would arrive at the park with every intention of conducting interviews, and several times I left with nothing recorded. I spent hours walking along the pond, sitting on the benches along the artificial streams, all the while mentally tinkering with the introduction I would use when approaching someone.

In part I was just generally shy about approaching people, a feeling which led to a few minor crises of the self regarding my identity as an ethnographic researcher. More specifically, though, I was terrified of being a “creepy guy in the park,” or of triggering the same defensiveness in people that I feel when aggressive, clipboard-carrying Greenpeace canvassers corner me outside of the grocery store. Clearly this was rooted in personal insecurities (does anyone actually strive for “creepy guy in the park,” after all?), but it also came from a concern about the quality of the data I would get out of these exchanges. Defensiveness was almost certainly not a good place to start for getting candid, honest thoughts about Santa Barbara’s drought.

Eventually I got over these nerves, and once I did I found that interviewing strangers about the drought felt surprisingly easy given the topic’s increasing visibility in the news and other media. Typically I approached people with some variation on the line I had worked out in my head during all those hours of walking through the park, which went “Excuse me?

I'm doing a project for UCSB about the drought in Santa Barbara. Do you have time to answer a couple of questions?" No one I approached responded to this defensively or even with much surprise. There was always a moment when it seemed to me that the parkgoer must be thinking "sure, this makes sense," as in, of course someone is going around asking about the drought. It had become such a common topic, a fixture in everyone's general consciousness, that it was disarmingly familiar. As such, once I had explained the project and asked for permission to record our conversation, most parkgoers had no shortage of thoughts about the topic.

This dynamic generally carried over to my next round of interviews too, this one at Oak Park. I chose Oak Park as a complement/contrast to Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden because it attracts patrons from different neighborhoods, including the nearby and mostly park-starved West Side, and because it presents a qualitatively different experience of nature. As mentioned before, the main aspect of these interviews that differentiated them from the set conducted at Alice Keck was directly related to the demographic differences in the two populations of parkgoers. Most of the patrons I encountered at Oak Park were Latino/Latina, so many of my interviews were conducted in Spanish with the help of an interpreter. These interviews were conducted in October and November 2015, after I had visited Oak Park several times on my own to walk the area and silently observe and take notes about the park and its goings-on, the same as I had done for Alice Keck.

The two populations of parkgoers produced a number of different conversational dynamics during interviews. My own background and personal relation to my topic of research put me in varying social positions relative to my interviewees, whose demographics varied significantly. Some of my personal demographic characteristics that were sometimes important in establishing the dynamic of the interviews were gender and race (I am a white

male), class (I come from a middle-class background), education and occupation (I am a graduate student researcher in sociology), age (I turned 24 during my data collection), and hometown (I am a lifelong resident of Santa Barbara, which sometimes came up in interviews, and sometimes did not). In many ethnographic studies, one of these factors might be far and away the most important for determining the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. For example, in *Sidewalk*, Mitch Duneier (2001) maintains that, despite major differences in class, religion, education, and occupation, the most important difference between his research subjects (New York City street vendors) and himself was racial difference. In my case, each of the factors I listed above held particular sway in defining my relationship to different interviewees. Sometimes there were racial and class disparities that significantly colored my exchanges with parkgoers, other times I interviewed middle class whites who were much older than me and gave me the occasional unsolicited piece of career advice.

For the most part, though, in my Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden interviews my status as a researcher and the fact that I myself was a Santa Barbara resident with roughly similar socioeconomic status to most of my interviewees lent me status as “expert” and “insider.” That is to say that, to me, these interviews seemed to proceed as conversations on equal ground, and this dynamic, along with my identity as a researcher on the topic, gave me a sense of confidence and comfort. In Oak Park there were much more consistent racial and class differences between my interviewees and myself, which created power differences between researcher and subject that did not exist at Alice Keck. On the one hand, all but one of my interviewees (a white woman named Andrea) were Latino/Latina, and most were laborers in the landscape architecture industry, which put me, the middle class, white researcher in a position of power. Some people I spoke with were reluctant at first, wary that

they might be asked to divulge personal information they were not comfortable with, and some parkgoers opted not to be interviewed for this reason. On the other hand, though, the presence of a language barrier often took the statuses of “insider” and “expert” that I had in my Alice Keck interviews away from me. In this case my lifelong residence in Santa Barbara mattered much less, and I became an “outsider,” while my interviewees had a degree of power over the flow and content of the interview. Figure 1 contains a full list of the interviewees included in this thesis.

As Kum-Kum Bhavnani (1993) discussed in “Tracing the Contours,” each individual relationship between researcher and subject, interviewer and interviewee, offers particular contributions to knowledge or truth. One of my key strategies for maintaining a sensitivity to the relationship between my own position and that of my interviewees is the form that my written analysis takes. I take the same approach laid out in *Articulating Arabness: Gender and Cultural Identity in the Diaspora* by Nadine Naber (2011), who “positioned [herself] has an auto-ethnographer who aims to narrate each story, place it in ... context, and provide some sort of background, analysis, commentary, or interpretation.” This approach results in a self-aware, narrative-style telling of my interactions with parkgoers and key informants alike. I hold narrative to be a powerful tool, indeed one of our most potent for explaining, expressing, and creating knowledge, as was argued by William Cronon in “A Place for Stories” (1992).

My methodological approach and my use of this tool of narrative is guided by a commitment to multiple, diverse perspectives. This comes out of theoretical assumptions articulated by scholars engaged with a sociology of knowledge tradition like Karl Mannheim (1936), as well as feminist standpoint theorists such as Donna Haraway (1988), Sandra Harding (1991, 1992), Dorothy Smith (1992), and Helen Longino (1993). All of these

writers would stress the importance of multiplicity, against the single perspective of an idealized, objective observer in making sound claims to truth. The “truth” in question for this project is an overall picture of how Santa Barbara residents experience nature, and how they experience the drought in that context. This might be better expressed in the terms of a “structure of feeling” around Santa Barbara’s cultural relationship to the environment, this term coming from Raymond Williams’s approach to cultural analysis. Williams’s concept describes an amalgamation of perspectives, attitudes, and experiences collectively forming a “structure” that hovers above individual consciousness and is in constant dialectical relationship to the material conditions of society. As Williams himself describes it, to talk of structures of feeling is to talk about “specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships; not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought” (1977). For all the reasons outlined above, I believe taking to city parks to interview a diverse sample of Santa Barbara residents about their experiences with the drought offers invaluable insight into the state of Santa Barbarans’ structure of feeling regarding environmental issues.

Moreover, these structures tend to lie outside of either conscious individual thought or feeling; Williams writes that they are “social experiences ... not yet recognized as social, but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis ... [have their] emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed [their] specific hierarchies” (1977). Because I am hoping to capture something so difficult to articulate through individual experience, I assert that the analysis required to reveal these characteristics must consider my interviews specifically in conjunction with the dynamics of the parkgoers’ interactions with the physical spaces themselves. These latter data points are equally as valuable as the former. Indeed this is a key factor guiding my overall design of this research, as an empirical study on the drought guiding a broader empirical study of nature in Santa

Barbara. Asking interviewees directly about their ideas of nature might be an interesting project in its own right, but I believe I can collect much more useful data to the end of describing this “structure of feeling” listening to accounts of the drought and observing engagement with urban nature vis-à-vis city parks. This model gives me access to what I identify as both sides of the dialectical relationship from which this structure of feeling emerges: the material conditions presented by the drought, and cultural interaction with the physical, nonhuman world.

#### **IV. RESULTS**

Here I will discuss the interviews from this thesis, beginning with my key informants Madeline Ward, Timothy Downey, and Katie Davis, devoting a subsection to each in that order. I will then discuss the interviews from my ethnographic fieldwork. Data from both sites, Alice Keck Memorial Garden and Oak Park, will be discussed in two respective subsections.

##### ***Rethinking “Green” in Santa Barbara***

I spoke with Madeline Ward in late June of 2015, across Garden Street from Santa Barbara’s Public Works Department, in a conference room overlooking a warm, clear, and, of course, dry Santa Barbara day. Madeline ward is the City of Santa Barbara’s Acting Water Conservation Coordinator, or head of the Water Conservation Program (WCP), the subsidiary of the Public Works Department currently tasked with mitigating the water crisis. The WCP, which falls under the broader Water Resources Division, attempts to promote practices that eliminate unnecessary water use in the City of Santa Barbara’s water district,

which is actually just one of several different districts, each under their own management, in the greater Santa Barbara area. Nearby Goleta has its own district, as do the unincorporated and tremendously wealthy areas of Montecito and Hope Ranch.

Madeline Ward's WCP has a significant claim to success, as the City of Santa Barbara Water District has ranked first in Southern California, and fourth in the entire state in terms of water conservation. This evaluation, Ward explains, is based on the measure of gallons per person per day (GPPD), or rather reduction in GPPD. She is quick to point out that GPPD is an imperfect method for evaluating water use and water conservation, a poor "apples to apples comparison," because it erases differences in population density. "Goleta has small parcels," she says, "and a very large population," which contrasts with Montecito, which borders Santa Barbara on the opposite side of town, with its "very few residents, very large parcels." Consequently, "Montecito is a very high gallons per capita per day, Goleta is a very low one." Santa Barbara falls somewhere between these two extremes, with some high density, multi-family housing, and some large Montecito-esque single family parcels. In the Santa Barbara area, the differences in population density that muddle GPPD figures are tied to the area's class stratification. Montecito would rank above Santa Barbara in recent conservation, but its population is too small for it to be considered. This might appear to cast Montecito as a progressive haven of environmental responsibility, but the massive cuts in water use Ward tells me it has made have only been possible because of the astronomical per capita water use that is the norm there.

The heavy variation of GPPD in Santa Barbara is largely the result of landscape architecture. Ward also cites landscaping as the biggest strain on Santa Barbara's water supply, saying "about half of our water goes to that." One of the biggest problems is automatic irrigation systems, which Ward says often waste water when they are programmed



to water far more than is necessary, unbeknownst to the operator or the owner of the property. Another issue is that Santa Barbara has a lot of paid gardeners, which is unsurprising given the landscaping-heavy estates that many of Santa Barbara's super rich own. Gardeners, after all, are tasked with keeping plant life alive and healthy-looking first and foremost, not with saving water. The person maintaining the plants will likely never see the water bill, and the one who pays it will have no way of telling that they are charged for more water than they really need. This essentially places the burden of the most crucial arena of water conservation in Santa Barbara, the landscaping of massive estates, on a population with some of the least social power. Sure enough, Ward tells me a phone survey operated by the Santa Barbara Water Conservation Program revealed that "medium and high water users" typically reported that they were doing all they could do to reduce water use.

The issue of overwatering of Santa Barbara's landscape architecture speaks to structural and cultural barriers to water conservation at the city-wide level. First, tending to landscape architecture is perhaps the most heavily mediated form of water use in Santa Barbara. Ward says that people tend to immediately associate water conservation with indoor activities such as "washing hands, brushing your teeth," or showering, but her program has been trying to shift the focus outdoors. Of course, virtually any use of water in Santa Barbara is necessarily mediated; no one is taking water directly from the reservoir. With the indoor activities she cites, though, Ward notes that when residents use water in these ways, "they're touching the water, they're seeing it go down the drain, they're seeing it being used." It makes sense then, that these would also be the easiest ways for residents to conceptualize water conservation. Landscaping is mediated in more dramatic ways, though. Especially when residents use irrigation systems, they have much less personal contact with the water, much less awareness of the volume that gets used.

That landscaping is such a strain on the water supply at all, though, says revealing things about Santa Barbara. Landscape architecture, ultimately the conscious use of plant life to actualize a culturally preferred aesthetic, is an expensive endeavor, one undertaken and financed by Santa Barbara's most wealthy, and facilitated and maintained by mostly Latino manual laborers. Besides the hard work of these less privileged residents, though, a great deal of water is being utilized to maintain the physical area's appearance, to manifest that aesthetic favored by Santa Barbara's affluent. For the prospects of water conservation, landscaping, and the intense commitment the city has made to a certain appearance, poses a self-perpetuating problem. The ways it mediates and abstracts water use from the actual water supply are potentially wasteful only because landscape architecture in Santa Barbara evokes lushness and plenty, and has consequently engendered a sense of place that does not invite us to be conscious or critical of water use. Madeline Ward is adamant that people, and particularly their habits around watering their plants, are what taxes the dwindling reservoirs, not the plant life that watering supports. I agree with this, but I will argue in more detail later that the plants we prioritize do bring significant influence to bear on the way we conceptualize water as a resource, and thus the ways we use it.

There are signs, though, that the drought, which dates back several years as I write in 2016, is forcing Santa Barbara residents to rethink in fundamental ways their relationship to the environment, particularly with respect to the plant life they keep around them for aesthetic purposes. These are changes that Madeline Ward's Water Conservation Program has been promoting with the slogan "gold is the new green." Part of the City's approach of targeting landscaping, this campaign asks residents with lawns to forego watering them to conserve water. "Green" is a concept that is central to the sensibilities of those at the intersection of Santa Barbara's moneyed population and its liberal-leaning, environmentally

concerned one. In mainstream environmentalism, “green” is synonymous with eco-friendly. There is a reason we call it “greenwashing” when big corporations attempt to play up superficial commitments to environmental issues. It is inherently bound up in the idea that nature is therapeutic and universally good, but is defined as only those “wild things” (Cronon 1996; Price 2006) that embody a specific aesthetic. A bright green lawn in drought-ridden Santa Barbara, California is a prime example of how “green,” as an aesthetic, can in fact be wholly anti-ecological.

Surely a green lawn is not evocative of the same thing as a palm tree, but I argue they signify different parts of the same cultural attitude about the environment. Perhaps, in fact, they represent the polar ends of a single set of desires of a population bent on having it both ways: living in a



Figure 1: One of the WCP's lawn signs.

coastal, tropical-looking paradise, but retaining the lush grass in front of one’s house that was likely much more at home in the regions many transplants left behind for Southern California. They both represent an attempt to bring the assumed psychological and physiological benefits of nature to our urban homes, an attempt which often coincides with overuse of resources like water, or more general negative impacts on the ecosystem in which a person lives. “Gold is the new green” attempts to reverse that contradiction. The City of Santa Barbara’s Public Works Department gives away free lawn signs, of the sort typically

used to endorse a political candidate, that bear this slogan. Ward says the city made these to give those who stopped watering their lawns a “badge of honor.” A green lawn, Ward points out, is essentially a purely aesthetic luxury: “... turf grass, has a purpose,” she says, “and that purpose is recreation. And most people don’t recreate on their front lawns. If they have kids, if they have dogs ... it’s usually the back yard.” By shifting to gold, though, that aesthetic becomes much more in touch with the reality of Santa Barbara’s climate. Despite our almost universally positive valuation of it, “green” is not ecological everywhere. So many vast ecosystems, from the American Great Plains to the Gobi Desert, are more golden or brown than they are green.

It is difficult to gauge exactly how much credit should be assigned the Water Conservation Program for shifting Santa Barbara’s collective consciousness, but at the very least “gold is the new green” captures and summarizes the shifting sentiments. That green lawns are becoming less common, and that many citizens now may look at them reprovably rather than admiringly, indicates that, in at least some small way, Santa Barbarans are reconsidering their evaluations of what is ecological, and reconsidering their relationship to their environment. Indeed, Ward says of those residents who have “gold is the new green” lawn signs, “generally what we’ve been seeing is they have that sign for a while, and then eventually they just remove the lawn and put in water-wise plants,” or the type of landscaping palate that her program promotes for Santa Barbara. She reports that some of the “go-to” signs around town that the Water Conservation Program would refer interested journalists to for a photo-op are no longer there because the grass in question has been removed. Clearly some Santa Barbara residents are responding to the drought as more than just a temporary disruption to the status quo, but as a severe indication that they must make permanent or at least indefinite changes to their use of resources. Rather than simply letting

the grass go until the problem solves itself, they take the grass out entirely, recognizing it as a problem in its own right.

This is not without precedent in Santa Barbara, as Ward notes that previous droughts had lasting effects on the city:

**MADLINE:** Um, one thing that is important, because the drought will end one of these days, is that, um, at least comparing our last drought, um, from 87 to 91, we're already using 20 percent less water –

**ANDY:** Mhm.

**MADLINE:** -than we were going into that drought. So, um, at least when you look at our past water use, and I believe it will definitely carry through with this drought as well, is it was always, you know, around 14,000 acre feet, and then it dropped steadily because of that drought, and then it slowly rose –

**ANDY:** Hmm.

**MADLINE:** - and this is during, you know, the population going up too. But it never came back to the same level –

**ANDY:** Hmm.

**MADLINE:** - before that drought, because there were a lot of changes and I think there were a lot of permanent landscape changes that were made, a lot of behavioral changes that became permanent, and then also, water fixtures, you know.

Of course, this current drought's unprecedented severity has been well documented. While the threat that this disaster poses is grave, it comes with the potential for a more substantial reevaluation of Santa Barbara's relationship to the environment and its place within the local ecology. Given what Ward says about the long term effects on water use of previous droughts, this potential does not seem all that unlikely. Depending on how the drought, and California's broader situation vis-à-vis its unique climate play out in the next couple of years, something like "gold is the new green" could progress into a significant

overhaul of Santa Barbara's attitudes about nature, a change which will be key to more substantive change in water use going forward.

"Gold is the new green" is not perfect. It does not directly address the city's structural inequality that is a barrier to more equitable and just management of resources, and in large part it cannot help but cast water conservation as a project to be carried out by privileged portions of the society that happen to possess the time, the means, and the goodwill to do so. It may not be a move towards a revolutionary new paradigm in Santa Barbara, and its shortcomings will be discussed at length in the sections to follow, but it is certainly at least a small move away from a more ecologically dangerous relationship to nature. It is just one of many competing currents in the response to the drought, though, among others that hold on fiercely to old ideas of entitlement to certain "natural" aesthetics. These others were exemplified in Perth, Australia a major city that has recently dealt with its own massive water crisis, and whose mayor told a BBC reporter she thought a "green city ... in a very dry climate" was possible (Mercer 2014). Possible, maybe, but is it truly something we ought to strive for? "Gold is the new green" opens that question.

### ***The Urban Forest in Ecological Crisis***

The day after talking to Madeline Ward, I visited Santa Barbara's Parks and Recreation office, around the corner from Public Works and a few blocks down Ortega Street. The office is a mostly unassuming building on Santa Barbara's lower east side. The Ortega Street entrance opens to an austere reception area with a few brochures on Parks Department programs. Through a hallway are a few employees' offices, and around back is a break room where green jumpsuit-clad workers eat their lunches between trips for tree maintenance and other Parks tasks. I have an appointment to meet with Timothy Downey,

the city arborist, who has agreed to be interviewed for this project. In the reception area, a phone rings while I am waiting for Downey, one of the receptionists answers, and I hear her side of a conversation about a dead tree in the caller's front yard. "What's the address?" she says, and then a little later, "Maybe when the drought is over." After she hangs up, I ask what prompted that response, and she tells me the caller asked for a crew to remove the dead tree, but also wondered about getting a new tree planted in its place, a request that this department cannot fulfil during the drought. This issue will wind up being an important topic in my conversation with Timothy Downey, and it will become clear how much this office laments its inability to grant requests like this caller's.

Downey's duties for the city are unique. In a prior conversation, he told me that most other Southern California cities do not have a comparable position. In fact, Downey's official title is "Urban Forest Superintendent." For simplicity's sake, he tells me, "in the job description it says 'shall be known as the city arborist.'" Downey is right, though, when he says that his official title is "a better description of the breadth of what this position really does." "I oversee the management of all city-owned trees," he tells me. He also oversees "privately-owned trees that are regulated by the city," and acts as "the city's expert in all tree matters." Put simply, Downey is in charge of regulating an aspect of Santa Barbara that may often be overlooked, but nevertheless is central to many people's conception of it as a place: the city's "urban forest." That is an industry term for Downey, and one that might sound like an oxymoron given a dualistic conception of nature and the social.

When I ask Downey about the logic behind the term "urban forest," he explains that, in its simplest definition, a forest is any area with a large quantity of trees, and that Santa Barbara and other similar cities certainly qualify by this criteria. In fact, he claimed the density of Santa Barbara's tree life exceeds that of the National Forests of Southern

California, including Los Padres, which covers the Santa Ynez Mountains that overlook the Santa Barbara area. Santa Barbarans might take the city's urban forest for granted, as an intrinsic quality of the city's physical geography that gets pushed into the subconscious of their cognitive, everyday experience of their home, rather than a feature to marvel at. This urban forest is remarkable, though, in both its scope, and in the undertaking required by Downey, his Parks staff, and all of their predecessors to create and maintain it. And in a big way, it is far from intrinsic. Santa Barbara, in a matter of a century or less, created a forest where there was not one, in a landscape once dominated by scrub oak and sage.

For 33 consecutive years, Santa Barbara has received the Arbor Day Foundation's "Tree City USA" designation, for which a city must have "a per capita budget to manage your trees of two dollars per person," as well as a "group that is responsible for the management of the trees," among other things in order to qualify. Downey tells me that a study, commissioned by Santa Barbara's botanical garden, of California cities with the Tree City USA designation found that the 450 different varieties of trees that Downey manages gives Santa Barbara the highest diversity of street trees in the state, edging out second place Santa Monica, which he notes "is three times the size of Santa Barbara." Downey also explains to me that Santa Barbara's regulations regarding permitted sidewalk width and incline, and street tree root barriers are geared much more towards protecting trees than those of other municipalities.

Predictably, there is a tremendous amount of planning and hands-on management that goes into all of this. For example, a particular species of tree may only be planted on a certain block, such as the Mexican Fan Palms that line Cabrillo Boulevard, if it is officially designated for that street in a massive document called the "Street Tree Master Plan." The process promotes diversity of street trees, a major goal of the department, and preserves a pragmatism to the urban forest that makes maintenance easier. The Street Tree Master plan,



Downey tells me, has grown from a document of around five pages at the time of its adoption in 1977 into the “huge excel spreadsheet” that it is today. That spreadsheet holds the blueprint for what is an enormous influence on how residents experience their surroundings, one that does not readily betray the conscious planning or bureaucracy behind it, one that appears natural. Nevertheless, Downey describes a process for amending the Street Tree Masterplan to include a new designation that proves the City of Santa Barbara does not take tree planting lightly:

**TIMOTHY:** Um, there’s a process to do that. We present the item to the Street Tree Advisory Committee. The Street Tree Advisory Committee recommends a tree to be designated for one section of street.

**ANDY:** Hmm.

**TIMOTHY:** That recommendation is presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission. They can change or add to a designation or leave it the same.

All of this goes to show how much investment Santa Barbara has in a natural aesthetic. When Santa Barbara is lauded for its scenic, or natural beauty, most would agree that there is an implicit assumption that the city is inherently beautiful, that its scenery is simply its physical geography that transcends the lives of those who live there. Of course, to say a place has scenic beauty at all is a reflection of a culturally preferred aesthetic, but it is true that Santa Barbara’s physical geography, its characteristics that predate human settlement of the area, provide the basic backdrop for the city to appeal to that aesthetic. Timothy Downey’s work in managing Santa Barbara’s urban forest, however, demonstrates how much effort has gone into creating the Santa Barbara we know today. His team in the Parks department has taken that backdrop the physical area provides and run with it, actualizing

Santa Barbara's brand of natural beauty in ways that would not have been possible without human intervention.

The sheer number of trees under Downey's jurisdiction, as well as their unbelievable diversity of species, is enough to have profound effects on the way Santa Barbarans conceptualize their relationship to nature. Downey tells me that Santa Barbara has trees "that are from six of the seven continents," adding, of course, that "the seventh continent is an ice patch ... there really aren't trees in that zone." From this we can gather that Santa Barbara's sense of place is profoundly connected to ideas of nature, yet in a way that is just as tied to conscious human decisions as it is to the intrinsic physical reality of the geographical space the city occupies. When we make significant, deliberate and purposeful interventions in the physical realities of our cities, we also necessarily change the way we conceive of them, what they mean to us.

There are also more subtle ways that the management of trees can affect our sense of place and our thoughts about the environment, though. In discussing the reasoning that goes into designating a certain tree for a certain area, Downey discusses factors beyond the practical considerations of maintenance and the desire for species diversity I have already mentioned. Trees are chosen based on the benefit they provide the community, particularly in the form of shade from the sun. In fact, another measure in which Santa Barbara's urban forest ranks remarkably high is percentage of canopy coverage. When I ask if aesthetics come into play, Downey acknowledges they do, but does not seem to regard it as very strong of a motivating factor. The examples that come to mind for him involve matching street trees to surrounding architecture, particularly in historic parts of town. When I think of a purely aesthetic street tree, though, I think of the palms that are particularly prominent along the shoreline, and along the downtown streets of Santa Barbara's upscale shopping area, or,

in other words, the most recognizable and most photographed areas of town. Palms like these provide little shade, and thus lack the practical benefit the community of other choices for street trees in Santa Barbara. More to the point though, these tall, slender palms signify ideas of leisure, relaxation, and in a related way, affluence. They are also associated with a physical climate that differs from Santa Barbara, a tropical, therefore rainy climate. The symbolic influence of the palm tree, particularly the ubiquitous Mexican fan palm variety, is enormous, as it almost certainly captures the imagination of the city's population in a way that none of the other 450 plus species of tree in Santa Barbara do. Santa Barbara's Water Conservation Coordinator Madeline Ward, in my interview with her, suggested that the "Santa Barbara landscaping look" is widely associated with plants like agave and bougainvillea, but I doubt either of those command the same stature as the palm tree.

Downey's urban forest is important because it has real, tangible effects on the environmental sensibilities of Santa Barbarans, which in turn have tremendous influence on their experience of the drought. For the most part, city trees are not among the most significant uses of water, but I argue that they nonetheless have very real implications for the goal of water conservation because their sheer abundance suggests a wetter climate than Santa Barbara actually has. Nonetheless, this is a point about which I personally feel conflicted; I receive the community benefits of the urban forest just like everyone else, and I am certainly glad the trees are there when they provide shade on my bike rides to and from work, but I still feel it necessary to think critically about whether having a lush forest in our semiarid climate promotes an ecologically healthy conception of place. The over-watering of landscape architecture that, as I heard from Madeline Ward, is such a strain on the water supply is almost certainly linked in part to residents' physical surroundings. Our culture around resource-use is informed by our conceptions of and relationships to place, and if we

perceive our surroundings as lush and green, we do not have an immediate reason to consider our water use. The image that most people associate with drought is of cracked, dry ground. The abundance of trees in Santa Barbara, particularly tropical-looking palms, calls to mind something else entirely.

The case of the urban forest is one where the internal contradictions related to nature that the drought has brought out in Santa Barbara are most visible. The dry conditions have put Timothy Downey in difficult positions in terms of his ability to meet his department's goals. For example, Downey explains that one of these goals is to plant "a number of trees ... at least equal to the amount removed." Once city council declared a drought, though, the department was forced to "[suspend] the planting of trees." As his forest shrinks, parts of it have also become harder to maintain. Downey says of some of the trees the city manages, particularly those native to equatorial climates, "they're in a drought all the time," since they are used to more water than they get in Santa Barbara, even under more typical circumstances. Some such trees are susceptible not only to the direct effects of the drought, but also to attack from insects like beetles, which is an indirect effect of their lack of moisture. These effects mirror the increasingly common dry and golden lawns discussed in the section above, both of them instances of steadily accumulating visual evidence of the drought that residents are beginning to encounter in the course of their daily lives.

A specific case Downey refers to was that of the stone pines on Anapamu Street near Santa Barbara High School. In October 2014, the *Santa Barbara Independent*, a weekly paper that is one of the city's most widely read news outlets, ran a piece titled "Killed by Drought, Four Historic Stone Pines Getting the Ax" (Anon 2014). This is just one of many stories the *Independent* has published about the plight of the stone pines during the drought. It gives the exact locations of the three trees to be cut down, details a plan to install a kind of

irrigating lifejacket on the remaining trees to help them avoid this fate, and generally conveys the sense that the drought is posing a legitimate threat to parts of Santa Barbara that residents hold dear. Santa Barbara mayor Helene Schneider is quoted in the piece, saying “the ones to be removed will be missed tremendously. We will endeavor to do all that we can to make sure the remaining trees thrive during the drought and for many years beyond” (Anon 2014).

As this article notes, Downey’s team has had to take special measures to combat the drought’s effects, including watering adult trees, which he says they normally never do. In short, the drought is testing the commitment the city has made to its particular embodiment of nature. This commitment is enormous, and Downey is fighting for it. Some of the trees that are affected are over 100 years old, much exceeding the typical life of most street trees. It is not difficult to see why Downey, or even Santa Barbara at large, feels that the stakes are much higher with these trees than with a lawn, for example, which can grow back in a matter of months. Just as we saw with “gold is the new green,” though, the drought is clearly causing a cultural shift relating to nature, a reevaluation of what plants it makes sense to keep around. The experience of this drought will almost certainly have lasting impacts on the kinds of investments the Parks Department makes going forward, which will change the way Santa Barbara looks and feels to residents. Given how integral the urban forest is to the sense of place in Santa Barbara, this will likely mean significant changes in the dominant local conception of the environment, and in turn residents’ sensibilities regarding environmental issues.

Of course, Timothy Downey’s department knows that droughts are far from unheard of in Southern California. But these are very special circumstances, which is why they have such potential to engender change in the first place. While on the topic of planning for

potential droughts, I off-handedly mention that, of course, the current one is particularly severe. At this point Downey cuts me off, and, in a more serious voice than he has used the rest of the interview, conveys just how trying the drought has been, saying, “this is the most severe in recorded history in the area.” Downey and the Parks Department do so much behind-the-scenes work that goes into Santa Barbarans’ experience of their city, and have perhaps unrivaled influence over the particular aesthetic that embodies nature there. If their job is so acutely affected by this crisis, then that will certainly have ramifications for the city’s entire social reality.

### ***Measure P and Environmentalism vs. Nature***

In November 2014, the month following the *Santa Barbara Independent* article about the death of Anapamu Street’s stone pines, Santa Barbarans voted on Measure P, an initiative that proposed a ban in Santa Barbara County on hydraulic fracturing (fracking), steam injection drilling, and other “extreme” methods of oil extraction. The initiative was put on the ballot by a group of environmental activists called the Water Guardians. As the group’s name implies, their campaign against fracking was directly tied to water issues. Some of their main arguments in favor of Measure P were that fracking is not only water-intensive, but also has been shown to damage and contaminate aquifers, making it a risky and irresponsible undertaking in such severe drought conditions. This vote was one event in a long and rich history of clashes between oil and environmentalists, filled with various victories for each side. The opposition to Measure P made controversial claims that the measure would stifle the economy by causing a supposed “shutdown” of the oil industry in the area, as well as loosely veiled threats of lawsuits to be levied against the city by the oil companies who donated millions to the “no” campaign (Hoffman 2014), should the measure

pass. The two sides' arguments gave Measure P a typical "economy versus the environment" feel, with a special emphasis on water issues. Despite growing concerns over the drought, and the effects it was already having on the Santa Barbara landscape (i.e. its historic stone pines), Measure P was resoundingly defeated in the polls, with 61 percent of 110,803 voters casting votes against the initiative (Santa Barbara County 2014).

I interviewed Katie Davis, one of the Water Guardians in question, and asked what kind of obstacles the Measure P campaign faced. There were, of course, many factors that contributed to the initiative's defeat, but one of the stories contained in the final numbers that stands out is the way two communities, Isla Vista and Montecito, voted. Isla Vista, the densely populated area adjacent to UC Santa Barbara that is predominantly college-aged, voted overwhelmingly in favor of Measure P (80 percent, according to Davis). This is no shock, given that a Gallup poll reported that Americans ages "18 to 29 are more worried about global warming than older adults, particularly those 50 and older" (Newport 2014). Montecito, on the other hand, the super-rich enclave above east Santa Barbara that leans, in Davis's words, toward "older, wealthier, Fox News-viewing" was a "No on P" stronghold. What makes this comparison remarkable is that Isla Vista had the potential to be a major factor at the polls, since its population more than doubles that of Montecito, yet Davis told me it generated half the number of votes that Montecito did. The way she put it was "one person in Montecito counts for four people in Isla Vista." In other words, at the same voting rates, Isla Vista would have had to have a population four times its current size to generate the presence at the polls that Montecito did.

The results of this ballot initiative point to a few important realities about the two communities juxtaposed by Katie Davis in our interview. College-aged people appear to have legitimate potential for changing the culture around environmental issues in Santa

Barbara, and in this sense for pushing the city to reimagine its relationship to nature. This is evident in Davis's simple and frank response when I recalled the other places around the country that had fracking bans on the ballot last year:

**ANDY:** Yeah, one of the things I remember in the aftermath of the campaign was being shocked at ... the counties around the country that did manage to ban fracking, like I think Denton, Texas did or something? And [it] ... just made me go ... "how can Santa Barbara, California not manage to do this if Denton, Texas can?"

**KATIE:** Denton's a college town.

**ANDY:** Yeah, I guess.

**KATIE:** They had a higher portion and it's about the percentage of voters.

Isla Vista has this same potential for leading change in Santa Barbara, but some important factors hold it back. For one, the population turns over rapidly, as graduating college students move back to other communities. Additionally, many would-be voters in these elections cast ballots in their parents' home districts instead. The Santa Barbara area has a significant college population, but it differs from many other "college towns" around the country in that this population is heavily confined to a small, secluded corner of town, and the local community is less specifically and heavily tied to university life than places like State College, Pennsylvania, for instance. Despite its ever growing population and population density, Isla Vista remains an unincorporated community of Santa Barbara County, not officially its own city or a part of either Santa Barbara or Goleta. Growing up in Santa Barbara, I myself spent remarkably little time around UC Santa Barbara or Isla Vista in the 20 years of my life before I enrolled there as an undergrad. The compartmentalization of the greater Santa Barbara community that places IV apart from the rest of the area, while



simultaneously politically marginalizing it to a degree by withholding full representation in local government, poses obstacles to the student community recognizing its potential to affect change in the local culture around environmental issues.

Nevertheless, the UCSB student community has had major impacts on these issues in the past. When I asked Katie Davis for her general assessment of environmentalism in Santa Barbara, she brought up some of the local history that many people with whom I spoke for this project called to mind. This is the flurry of action in the 1970s that established Santa Barbara as a mecca of American environmentalism in the wake of the 1969 offshore oil spill. UCSB was central in this, and indeed, Davis alludes to the establishment of the university's Environmental Studies program alongside the other organizations and watchdog groups formed at the time. "This stuff is here ... because there was a lot of activism in the 70s that helped create them," Davis says. Unfortunately, though, she also describes a period of relative stasis that environmentalism has gone through in Santa Barbara since these dramatic years. There are few new environmental groups forming, she told me, and "there's kind of a sense amongst the old guard that they don't even want new people." She even encountered this in her own campaign: "When we started the Water Guardians," she recalled, "there was ... a little bit of a sense ... from the old guard, like ... who are these new people?"

Like so much American environmentalism, the activism that propelled reforms and the growth of environmentalist culture in Santa Barbara was motivated at least in part by aestheticized nature and a desire to preserve it. After all, a major catalyst of the local movement that came out of the 1969 spill was the jarring image of Santa Barbara's pristine beaches contaminated by a human industry. The drive to protect nature in these terms is surely still the emotional impetus many have for engaging with environmentalist causes in this area, especially if Davis is right about local environmentalism not having evolved

significantly in recent decades. This brings me back to the case of Montecito. If Anapamu's stone pines were a canary in the coal mine of the drought's implicit threat to the nature that Santa Barbarans value, and if, as I have discussed, Montecito residents have perhaps the biggest stake in the fate of aestheticised nature (their rates of water use for landscaping are astronomical, after all), it would follow that the Water Guardians' rallying cry of "save our water" would hit home especially hard in this area. This clearly was not the case though. So what happened? Why did Montecito so easily write off a potential threat to the area's groundwater supply?

To me the link between fracking and the drought always seemed obvious. I asked Katie Davis why she suspected this connection did not resonate with Montecito residents or appeal to their sensibilities about the environment; she laughed, "they have plenty of water," and summed up the use of water for landscape architecture in Montecito in these terms: "it comes out, you pay for it, and it's green." In essence, what Davis is getting at here is that the nature with which Santa Barbara's rich surround themselves is more connected to capital than it is to a deep sense of engagement with the biophysical setting of our city. It is created and maintained in a manner that is so heavily mediated, so removed from the actual source of water, that it does not prompt residents to think much about the use of material resources involved. Nature can be a symbol of higher class status, a kind of cultural capital, but one that is produced, distributed, and consumed as a commodity. Furthermore it seems from this particular case at least that as long as this is the prevailing conception of nature, then appeals to the preservation of nature are not the most successful strategies for mobilizing public opinion against extractive industries like oil. This is perhaps because appraising a landscape for its aesthetic value, at least in these terms of commodified nature, is not actually as critically different from appraising it in terms of its material value.

Appeals to our sensibilities around aesthetic nature were certainly a part of the Measure P campaign. The text on the “Yes on P” campaign signs that the Water Guardians rolled out for the election was set on a backdrop that featured an illustrated image of a



**Figure 2: The graphic that appeared on "Yes on P" signs.**

typically idealized pastoral landscape. Part of this scene is a lake, but this is a small feature despite the sign’s slogan of “save our water!” Much of the picture is taken up by bright green rolling hills. Aesthetic nature is central to this pitch by the Water Guardians. The best indication of this approach’s shortcomings, though, may be found in the signs made by the opposition to Measure P, about which Davis could not help but laugh when we discussed them. These signs were even more understated, but attempted to appeal to the same vague environmentalist sentiments that the Water Guardians did. The white text of the “No on P” signs was printed on a plain, solid green background. It is fair to assume that this choice of color was a tactical one. Katie Davis described it as “clearly greenwashing.” If it was this easy for an oil company to co-opt trademark environmentalist imagery or aesthetics, then it is not hard to see how Montecito could be such a stronghold for the “No on P” side, and it is apparent how weak the connection can be between idealized nature and legitimate concern for the well-being of ecosystems that surround us. To be clear, I do not intend to suggest the “No on P” side’s green signs were the most important factor to their victory (this would inappropriately distract from the massive amount of money spent by oil companies on the

imagery or aesthetics, then it is not hard to see how Montecito could be such a stronghold for the “No on P” side, and it is apparent how weak the connection can be between idealized nature and legitimate concern for the well-being of ecosystems that surround us. To be clear, I do not intend to suggest the “No on P” side’s green signs were the most important factor to their victory (this would inappropriately distract from the massive amount of money spent by oil companies on the campaign). Nonetheless it is significant that those who opposed a ban on fracking saw “green” as a viable aspect of the imagery/rhetoric they deliberately chose to associate with their cause. The Water Guardians’ attempt to ban fracking in Santa Barbara was connected to two distinct but related tensions in the area. The first of these is the decades-long and ongoing struggle between the oil industry and the backlash to its presence from the environmentalist community. This is, of course, a tension with a global scale, but in many ways Santa Barbara seems like ground zero for it. Katie Davis mentioned that this area is home to the site of the first ever ocean offshore drilling, an 1896 well off the shores of nearby Summerland, a fact also noted by Freudenburg and Gramling (1993) in their comparison of attitudes to offshore drilling in California and Louisiana. Add to that century-plus history of drilling the 1969 spill and the focus of the national environmentalist movement it brought Santa Barbara, and it becomes clear that Santa Barbara has long been an epicenter of this conflict.

Measure P may also be a link between this tension and the second, emerging one between cultural attitudes about nature, including those in which environmentalists have much emotional investment, and the social and ecological balances of the Santa Barbara area. By social balances I mean the city’s internal hierarchies and the socioeconomic inequalities that are built into its functionality and therefore into the ways we conceive of it as a place. This tension is being magnified as the drought makes much of Santa Barbara

reconsider the aesthetics that are central to how it experiences nature. In the process many may become more aware of injustices that typical environmentalist appeals to a commodified aesthetic nature cannot address. These conceptualizations of nature are themselves imbued with hierarchy.

These two are inextricably connected, and Davis acknowledges this when she refers to Santa Barbara as an “oasis” built in a less than sustainable place to build one, but contends that the oil industry’s presence creates huge barriers to addressing some of its sustainability problems. I would argue that the tension around culture and nature is in fact the dialectical product of the one between oil and environmental activism. Environmentalists are finding out that they have to acknowledge and contend with the contradictions between aesthetic nature and society’s place within ecology, in ways that for years they have not, in order to have success. I will continue to argue that by doing so, those of us concerned with environmental causes must necessarily also be more cognizant of the issues of social justice that are so closely connected to them.

### ***The “Taste” for Nature in Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden***

Santa Barbara’s streets themselves bring nature to city residents in a deliberate and carefully planned fashion undertaken by the Parks Department, but this process is perhaps most powerful in one park covering a single city block downtown. Bordering Arrellaga and Micheltorena Streets on two parallel sides, Santa Barbara and Garden Streets on the others, Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden is a “botanical collection of 75 different tree and plant species” (Santa Barbara Parks 2016). The park features a large pond complete with koi fish and scores of turtles that bask on lily pads, and winding dirt paths that comprise a “walking tour” of its abundant plant life. The title of Leo Marx’s seminal work of ecocriticism, *The Machine in the Garden* gets its name from a literary trope that the author analyzes, in which a serene and pastoral nature landscape is jarringly and violently interrupted by some symbol of modern technology. In these same terms, urban parks like Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden might be thought of as the “garden” in the “machine” of the American city. Alice Keck is perhaps the most extreme of these examples for the incredibly dense plant life its designers employ to separate it from the city around it. Just as the repeated evocation of the “machine in the garden” in literature is, the “garden in the machine” is deeply bound up in a confounding and contradictory set of commitments to both the “productivity, wealth, and power” of city life, and the idea that happiness can be derived from the “rural” or “pastoral” (Marx 1964).

In other words, this park embodies the way Santa Barbara, an urban environment, is closely associated with nature, as a therapeutic or healthy concept. However, it also exemplifies our capacity to carefully and painstakingly overlook the ways that the lived,



**Figure 4: One side of the sign in question.**

human world of the city is intertwined with and interacts with the complex ecology of its physical setting. In the summer of 2015 I went for a stroll through the garden, like so many other Santa Barbara residents, and like I have done countless times since my childhood. For a moment I

stopped at a double-sided sign with information about the park. One side has a blurb on the design of the park, which describes it as “informal” and “rural.” These may sound like unusual adjectives applied in this context, but I believe they were chosen to deliberately set this park in contrast with the “formal,” planned, urban environment around it. Indeed, the description also promises visitors that “the gurgling streams help one forget the traffic noise and city bustle.” However, much of the rest of this sign betrays the park’s characterization as “informal,” as it states that the plants in the park was organized by their water requirements (“from boggy to arid”), and in a way that creates “ever-changing combinations of color and texture” that “shift from one area to another.” The other side of the sign has a coded map, not unlike the blueprint of a building, displaying the positions of each of the park’s numerous plant species. In theory this garden presents an opportunity for us to

confront the contradictions inherent in a definition of nature as outside of the world of human activity, an opportunity to consider how nature might have a place within the urban after all, but the park is framed as a kind of nature enclave amid the otherwise unnatural city that surrounds it, which makes it easier to maintain a view of the urban and the natural as essentially separate.

I took a seat on a bench to read, but I was preoccupied with questions of what this park meant for Santa Barbara and its relationship to nature. A family with two small children walked by me and crossed one of many small bridges over the creeks that feed into the pond. The



**Figure 5: The pond, as seen from the Arrellaga and Micheltorena corner of the park.**

children marveled at the turtles in the water and one of the adults referred to the stream as their “natural” habitat. Surely the water is as natural a habitat as these turtles had ever known, but I wondered what other assumptions about the creek, what other ideas about “nature” were behind her use of the word. What ideas, what assumptions about this place did she envision her child developing?

I got up and took a stroll of my own, over the bridge and to a gazebo overlooking the pond. Upstream from me, two Parks and Recreation employees were on the opposite side of a small barrier removing what looked like leaves and other buildup that had amassed between the rocks and was slowing the flow of water, which made me think more deeply



about the conditions of this pond's existence. Surely I was aware before this that it was man made, but I had never given much consideration to the undertaking required to build it where there had been no pond before. Clearly this piece of nature is not only built by human hands, it is a product of the local water supply in exactly the same way the water from our taps at home is.

I went to ask one of the Parks employees about the pond and how it has been affected by the drought. He confirmed the obvious, that the water in the pond is from the municipal water supply, via a tap behind the park, and he told me that there are a series of pumps circulating the water through the streams. Before I even had the chance to mention the drought, he told me that the water quality has declined recently, because the drought has prohibited the Parks Department from doing some of its normal maintenance. Typically the pond is drained and dredged and then refilled, but the city will not allow that during the drought because it wants to maintain an image of water consciousness, he told me.

By and large, I found that the idea that nature is separate from the domain of human activity, so integral to the concept behind the park, carries over into the ways that many of Alice Keck's patrons who I would interview in the coming months think about water conservation and the drought. Most of the people I interviewed felt passionately about the drought, or at least there was always a general sense among them that it was a serious issue. When reflecting on their own experience, though, they mentioned mostly minor inconveniences that the drought had caused them, or perhaps more often that they had welcomed out of good will and desire to do the right thing. Typically they did not have major hardships to share. The first thing that came to mind for Christina Wilson, a veterinary student at Santa Barbara City College, for example, was the ordinance prohibiting restaurants from serving water except on request, a development she was quick to say was

not a major inconvenience. She had been doing her best to conserve water in ways she could control, though, which included bathing her pet snake in a smaller tub of water. Another interviewee told me flatly that the drought had not affected him at all. Responses to the question of what groups of Santa Barbara residents interviewees think have been hit particularly hard by the drought were often similar. One parkgoer, Maria Gordon, an employee of the local library system, recalled stories she had heard of Santa Barbara's rich "tanking in their water," adding sarcastically that "they probably feel that their two and a half hour showers need to continue so they've gone into crisis mode which means buying in their water." Others said they thought people largely had not been affected, sometimes lamenting this as a barrier to the drought being acknowledged as a truly dire issue.

These responses, as I am sure most of my interviewees who gave them would freely acknowledge, are indicative of a certain level of privilege that sections of Santa Barbara's population enjoys. So long as Santa Barbara is not completely out of water, the drought affects many residents



**Figure 6: A patch of dry, brown grass amid the otherwise lush park.**

in primarily indirect ways, ones that are largely mediated through these residents' relationships to nature as a consumable thing. Their sinks and showerheads still flow when turned on, so as of yet the water shortage seems to only affect the former side of the nature/society divide. Specifically, Santa Barbara's dominant preferences as far as what

kind of plant life it keeps around, or rather, what “nature” looks like here, is challenged by the drought. Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden is one of Santa Barbara’s most elaborate embodiments of culturally preferred nature, the sort that carries a degree of cultural capital, and which is similarly associated with privilege and affluence. It is a fair assumption that those residents who take advantage of the park’s walking plant tour and gurgling streams possess the taste for such nature, that they are in a position to consume it for its aesthetic value. Again, a key part of consuming nature in this way is considering it as essentially separate from us, as passively existing, without deeply considering the human labor involved in creating nature as we know it. This is why many Santa Barbara residents have few intensely personal stories to share of the effects of the drought on their lives.

This is made all the more clear by my interview with Robert Funai, which represented the starkest contrast to the interviews I have discussed so far. Funai works and volunteers for the Parks Department and many other local organizations and private clients as a gardener and horticulturalist. Besides this first-hand experience with the drought and Santa Barbara’s local plant ecology, he has expert knowledge on the topic in the form of college degrees in environmental studies, geography, and horticulture. While most of the other parkgoers I interviewed were similarly passionate about the topic, none of them had felt the effects of the drought in quite the way that Funai had. He did not have to think hard when I asked him if he thought the drought had affected certain groups more than others. “I make my living keeping plants alive with water ... it’s a reality for me,” Funai told me, continuing by saying that the drought affects his “well-being and income.” Funai has had to work for less during the drought, and has gotten by thanks to his superior knowledge of water conservation methods. Funai’s experience is a common sense reality that others nonetheless have difficulty noticing. That is because Funai is one of countless other people who work

behind the scenes in the production of Santa Barbara's natural aesthetic. That production is easy to take for granted when we are consuming nature.

Santa Barbara has many people who, like Funai, earn their living keeping plants alive with water. Of course, Funai's particular case is not representative of that whole population. He has access to various forms of cultural and social capital that are not afforded to many in similar positions. As I mentioned, Funai is college educated multiple times over, and he told me that he is able to live relatively cheaply in his grandfather's house. Many of Santa Barbara's gardener population likely do not have college degrees to buoy their chances in the labor market, or long-standing familial ties to the area that they may fall back on as they navigate Santa Barbara's uniquely expensive and cutthroat rental market. Still others may even be undocumented immigrants. Nonetheless, the drought has directly affected Funai's livelihood and it is reasonable to infer from his own experience that it has affected others in similar, and even more devastating ways.

In many ways my last interviewee at Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden bridged the moral conscience regarding water conservation felt by so many other people with whom I spoke, and the personal familiarity with the real life consequences of drought that Funai conveyed. Jesus Nuñez Flores sees parallels between our current drought and one that he remembers when he moved to Santa Barbara in the mid-80s. "For five years nothing was green and there was no work for gardeners," Flores told me early on in our conversation, quickly likening that situation to the present: "Now we're going five more years without water. A lot of guys aren't working." Flores is not a gardener himself, but the way he speaks about this issue is personal, and it is clear that he has seen drought take a toll on people around him. He is also quick to state that he believes that this drought is part of a global problem, that human beings are at fault for harming the environment, and that people

thus have a moral obligation to reverse practices that cause this harm. As far as Santa Barbara in particular, he believes people generally waste much water and have a responsibility to stop doing so. This sense of responsibility was certainly common throughout most of my interviews at this park, but for Flores it is connected to real, current lived consequences, not simply to the thought of some distant, far off comeuppance in store for humanity if we fail to change things now.

Flores talks about these issues with references to industrialization causing climate change, and human activity threatening the earth's water supply, but also in more esoteric terms. When he talks about humans having excavated deep mines, or when he says "we've dug tunnels through mountains," he is not just talking about the direct environmental impact of these endeavors, but rather he makes reference to a general hubris on the part of humanity, a sense that we can alter landscapes at will with no consequence. He believes this disregard for consequence has transformed Santa Barbara, which he says was a "paradise" when he moved here, but no more. As I have already made clear, I am inclined to complicate this by considering that what many people would say makes Santa Barbara a "paradise" in some ways is a product of reckless disregard, and considering the transformations to the city an opportunity to rethink that disregard. Nonetheless, Flores makes connections between large scale societal actions, the visual environmental changes he notices in his city, and the effects of both on people's' own daily lives in ways that few other interviewees do.

Towards the end of our conversation, Flores lamented the inability of many to make these connections, or more specifically what he perceives as a lack of interest or concern about environmental issues like the drought among his own community, saying "I don't know about Anglo-Saxons, but there are a lot of Latinos who don't care. It doesn't matter to them. They lack awareness that it's important to conserve our planet." This is a familiar

sentiment. The culture around environmentalism often casts these issues as causes reserved for whites, most commonly wealthy whites to whom environmental activism is more of a hobby than a life or death struggle. Given my interviews with Flores and Funai, this seems contradictory, since this demographic is clearly not the most personally affected by the drought, but nonetheless it is still easy to see where this conception comes from. As long as nature is seen as both outside of us and as an aesthetic commodity, it follows logically that those with the most stake in environmental issues would be Santa Barbara's affluent, who have the capital to conjure "nature" as we conceive of it. These ideas about environmentalism are not simply Santa Barbara phenomena. O'Brien and Njambi (2012), for example, discuss the systematic racism contained in one of America's biggest and most famous environmentalist projects, the National Parks system.

As we have seen, though, the "nature" for which Santa Barbara is famous, with which its most powerful residents surround themselves, is far from outside of society. Rather, it owes its existence to the labor of human hands, to the Santa Barbara residents whose collective work creates and maintains key contributing factors to the sense of place that is so intimately tied to this city. The more visible those connections become, in places like Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden, the more justice and equality-oriented versions of environmentalism we can have.

### ***Oak Park and an Alternative "Nature" for Santa Barbara***

Across town from Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden, tucked into a neighborhood just east of the Las Positas off ramp of US 101 North, is Santa Barbara's Oak Park. Walking through the elongated, hourglass shaped park that lies along a curving section of Alamar Avenue, parkgoers feel the crunch of the small, dried, prickly oak leaves from the trees that

lend the park its name, one of the co-designated official trees of Santa Barbara. Whereas Alice Keck is an engineered showcase of exotic, myriad plants and trees, Oak Park's design is comparatively minimalist, highlighted by these Coast Live Oaks, which are native to the area. Aside from these trees, its most prominent features are its options for various kinds of recreation, including tennis courts, multiple areas of picnic tables, and a children's play structure.

Oak Park has borne some evidence of the drought. Part of Santa Barbara's extensive network of creeks, which is cased in concrete in some areas and crossed by freeway overpasses and bike path bridges, bisects the park lengthwise in the form of Mission Creek.



**Figure 7: Mission Creek, as it appeared during my fieldwork at Oak Park.**

Lately most of these creeks are enigmatic presences in the city. Parks Department signs denote their presence where the only other visible evidence of running water is a dry, rocky creekbed. Mission Creek was no different the many times I visited Oak Park in the Fall of 2015. The

geographical dividing line between the park's two sides was a rocky ditch, made most clearly visible by the bridges that allow for dry crossing in wetter times. The water level in Santa Barbara's creeks fluctuates in periods of more regular rainfall, so a dry creekbed is not a condition exclusive to severe drought conditions. Still, Mission Creek's parched, rocky bottom stands as a contrast to the human made creeks at Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden

that gurgle and flow with the aid of pumps, regardless of rainfall. The former reflect material, climatic conditions, whereas the latter sidestep them.

The drought has been trying even for the park's eponymous coast live oaks. The Parks Department found a small source of help in preserving these trees by looking to Oak Park's counter to the concrete turtle and koi fish habitat in Alice Keck across town, a children's wading pool (the first pool to which I remember going). In October 2015, when the hot summer months were over and the wading pool closed for the season, the Parks Department repurposed the pool's water to "irrigate ... the large oak trees," instead of "[discarding it] to the sewer" like usual. (Anon 2015). This is a decision that came from the city bureaucracy and not the patrons of Oak Park themselves, and it also will not offer enough water to truly counteract the stress the drought has imposed on these trees. Nonetheless, it is symbolic of a degree of symbiosis in Oak Park between the activities of human society's built world, and the natural environment playing host to them.

This is indicative of a definition of urban nature in Oak Park, and a relationship between parkgoers and their environment, that is more give-and-take than the one-way relationship based around consumption on which Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden's embodiment of nature is predicated. On the one hand, Oak Park's human made offerings for recreation set it apart from Alice Keck's nature ambiance that purposefully downplays and obscures human activity and influence. On the other hand, Oak Park's nature lacks the kind of meticulous human planning and design behind Alice Keck, and thus retains many features of the biophysical landscape that might exist without development or human intervention. These differences affect the ways in which parkgoers engage with the "natural," or nonhuman world. Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden is packaged as an urban destination for those who specifically want to get close to nature. Many of its visitors go there to do nothing more than



sit and meditatively take in its serene atmosphere. While these parkgoers may seek out a kind of *break from* their everyday lives, Oak Park attracts people who come to meet nature *in the terms* of their everyday lives. The Alice Keck model may be more reflective of what nature looks like in popular conceptions, but it could be argued that Oak Park plays host to more personal engagements with natural space, because it offers an outdoor arena for typical events of Santa Barbara residents' daily lives. Ultimately, though, these distinctions come down to a qualitative difference in relationships to nature, or rather differences in taste that are representative of different class and racial demographics.

Another noticeable contrast between the two parks is in the ebb and flow of visitation at each. I visited Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden at varying times of day, on every different day of the week, and it reliably had at least a handful of people, usually at least five to six, sometimes 20-30. During the week, Oak Park is often vacant or nearly vacant, especially during the hours of the workday. At lunchtime, groups of people, many of them landscaping gardeners, stop by to eat on their lunch breaks. On the weekends I observed large groups of people, many of them mostly Latino, flock to Oak Park to make use of the multiple picnic table areas for birthday parties and other occasions. Oak Park's low level of traffic on weekdays is likely due in large part to the fact that many of its visitors are day laborers. This difference is also illustrative of the different relationships to nature that operate at the two parks. Alice Keck's more commodified nature is dependent on the leisure time required to consume it, and thus it serves a population whose class positions afford them such a luxury. In his classic "critique of the judgement of taste," which introduced the concept of cultural capital, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) argued that "distance from necessity," which today might be simply termed "privilege" in popular discourse, is a key predictor of one's cultural tastes. The taste for nature is no different in this respect. Neither mode of experiencing nature,

Alice Keck's or Oak Park's, is intrinsically better than the other, necessarily, but they represent different relationships to nature, which in turn are distinguished along class lines or by different "distances from necessity."

It is important to keep in mind here that, as with nearly everywhere, it is essentially impossible to talk about class in Santa Barbara without also talking about race. The city is heavily stratified along racial lines, and heavily segregated. Santa Barbara, and its mostly white upper class, depends on several forms of highly racialized labor performed by its large Latino populations. Many of Oak Park's frequenters are Latino people, and often, by virtue of working in the landscape architecture industry, they are integrally connected to the process that creates the more commodified experience of nature found at Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden, along Santa Barbara's beachside boulevards, and in private estates in the area's most well to do neighborhoods. Many of Santa Barbara's heavily Latino population of hourly gardeners come to Oak Park either to eat lunch during the workday, or on weekends to attend family gatherings. The gardeners with whom I spoke at Oak Park all had similar stories of losing work because of the drought, in ways that mirrored what I heard from Robert Funai, the landscaper/horticulturalist I talked to in Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden who had suffered loss of work due to the drought. These interviews had a different tenor from any of the others I conducted in either park. Typically, interviewees whom the drought had not affected in any particularly personal or powerful way nonetheless had plenty to say when I asked them about it, thinking out loud and considering all the small ways the drought had shown up in their lives. By contrast, these interviews with gardeners in Oak Park had a staccato rhythm of one-word or one-sentence answers that were ready at hand for the interviewee, but nonetheless spoke richly of lived experience. For instance, I spoke with two men, Jesus and Cleo, eating lunch at a picnic table and wearing shirts that bore the logo

of a landscaping company. I opened by asking them generally whether the drought had affected their lives in any way:

**ANDY:** So just generally, ... have you ... been aware of the drought, or has it affected your lives at all?

**JESUS:** At work, yeah.

**CLEO:** A lot.

After this I mentioned their shirts, and asked specifically if the drought had affected their work as gardeners.

**CLEO:** Yes, it really has.

**JESUS:** There is not a lot of landscaping because people are letting things die.

This topic was commonplace, a simple fact of life to them. Later on they gave me some specifics about how the drought has affected their work, telling me their hours have been cut in half. With clients letting plants, in particular grass, die, the number of different kinds of work for which they are hired has decreased. As Jesus put it, they “go, only [leaf] blow the house, clean up, ‘that’s it, let’s go home.’”

The effects that these changing practices regarding, and attitudes about domestic plants are having on this population permeate throughout the broader Latino/Latina community in Santa Barbara. Landscaping work is not the only source of income for the Latino community, but it is an industry that has become heavily racialized. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2014) writes that Mexican immigrant workers began to saturate a Southern

California labor market in gardening that had “wide-open opportunities” in the 1970s. Since then, landscape gardening has become closely associated with Latinos. Some of these immigrant workers have become self-employed owners of small landscaping companies, but this group is small compared to the class of wage-earners that support the industry (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2014). Their physically demanding work “supports the conspicuous consumption of domesticated nature and the nonproductive lawn” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2014). It would stand to reason that, if individual landscape laborers are losing work, then whole families, if not large sections of mostly-Latino neighborhoods in Santa Barbara’s West and East sides are feeling these effects. I heard evidence of this myself in another interview at Oak Park, this one with a vendor, Igineo, selling elote (corn on the cob with mayonnaise, cheese, and chile, a common Mexican street food). When asked whether he had been affected by the drought, he responded:

**IGINEO:** Yes, it has affected us a lot in our business. Many of my customers are gardeners, and many gardeners don’t have work, so they are not buying as much from me.

**ANDY:** Interesting.

**IGINEO:** It affects us all, because if they don’t have any work, we don’t sell anything.

Igineo is one of many vendors like him who are all organized into “zones” to maximize their profits. He told me there are vendors in several parts of town, listing San Andres and San Pascual, both streets on Santa Barbara’s West Side, and Milpas, the main drag of the East Side. Both of these areas are heavily Latino ethnic enclaves with businesses and restaurants that cater specifically to the Latino population. Igineo’s business has suffered

because a large portion of his clientele is made up of gardeners like Jesus and Cleo. As Igeneo put it, “without grass, they don’t have anything to do,” and thus are buying from him less, to the tune of a 25-30 percent recent drop in sales. Igeneo’s story indicates how the strength of a Latino ethnic economy in Santa Barbara may have suffered a mostly overlooked form of collateral damage from the drought. Because Santa Barbara’s brand of commodified nature relies on racialized labor, the rippling effects of the drought will also be racialized. There are far-reaching and often unexpected effects a significant number of Latino Santa Barbarans lose work, as Latino businesses like Igeneo's lose revenue.

It is important to keep in mind, though, that the social/economic consequences of the drought that I have just described are, in an important way, unique to an area with the specific culturally preferred aesthetic favored in Santa Barbara. Another gardener with whom I spoke, Hector, who was at Oak Park with his daughter for a birthday party, had a similar experience to Jesus and Cleo’s, but had some particular perspective that colored his description of the state of the landscaping industry in Santa Barbara different terms. He had this to say of landscaping companies in the area:

**HECTOR:** ... They want to keep the entire area really green, and there is a competition between the companies. If you have a really green area you’re going to call attention to yourself, and you’re going to get more clients.

**ANDY:** Huh. Interesting. So, so it’s easier to compete ... if you’re using plants that are green and look really lush [rather] than [using] things like cactus?

**HECTOR:** Yes.

The terms of this competition require heavy water use, of course, so the drought has cost him work, as companies cannot afford to operate in the same way during the drought.

Hector used to live in Arizona, he told me, where landscaping work was different. He contrasted the two places: “I was in Arizona, and in Arizona they have “DG” [decomposed granite] and desert plants and everything looks nice. Of course, you won’t have enough work like that in California.” Arizona may not have the image of a beacon of environmental sustainability, but the point that Hector makes here indicates Arizona’s dominant landscaping aesthetic at least corresponds with reasonable expectations for rainfall. In Santa Barbara, where the weather may be generally not as arid as Arizona, the predilection for green, lush-looking plants nonetheless signifies a climate much wetter than it actually has. The drought is exposing that contradiction, and people like Hector are paying the price for the city’s period of collective cognitive dissonance.

Those Oak Park patrons I spoke with whose livelihoods were not immediately affected by the drought still lamented, in one way or another, the inequality around gardens in Santa Barbara that the drought has highlighted. The first thing that came to mind for Evelia, a Latina woman also attending a birthday party at Oak Park, when I asked if the drought had affected her in any way, was that she could not have a garden. Noting the changes she has perceived in Santa Barbara over the course of the drought, she also said “it used to be a lot greener, the gardens are a lot drier.” Gardens also came to mind for Andrea, a white woman in her twenties that I spoke with that same day. When I asked her whether the drought had affected her in any substantive way, she did not relate the kinds of personal trials I heard from the landscape gardeners I spoke with, but nonetheless touched on similar issues:

**ANDY:** ... Has [the drought] affected you ... in your personal life in any way, or in your work life, or anything?

**ANDREA:** Not really. I mean, my manager doesn’t want ... us to water very much and I’d like to grow a garden, but ... it’s not ... doable right now.

This may seem like a small concern, but it still indicates the way the drought has differential effects on Santa Barbara residents' access to, and relationship to nature. The garden she desires is not simply precluded by the drought, but also by her particular living situation. Andrea also showed that Santa Barbarans are becoming increasingly in tune with the ways certain aesthetics are connected to water consumption and overuse:

**ANDREA:** ... I mean, ... they could, if they wanted to, like, fine people, they could drive around and look at, like, this house has a beautiful lush green lawn

**ANDY:** [laughing] Right.

**ANDREA:** And this house has a dead lawn and it's like, it's clear, you know where people are using the water.

This proposal shows that Andrea has taken seriously the “gold is the new green” sentiment espoused by Madeline Ward and the city's Water Conservation Program. The small indignation she and many residents are beginning to have about others' plainly visible conspicuous water consumption may indicate that the tide is turning, as far as Santa Barbara's nature aesthetic goes. Whereas a green lawn may have been viewed nearly universally positively before, it now may be met with the scorn Andrea expressed. This shift represents a change away from an imagination of nature that relies on exploitation of labor. We have seen that the plight of landscapers in Santa Barbara may be a symptom of Santa Barbara's systemic inequality, but it is also mediated by the particular dominant culture around nature in Santa Barbara, and the kind of plant aesthetic employed as a signification of wealth, leisure, and social standing. The potency of Oak Park and Alice Keck Park

Memorial Garden as symbols of contrasting relationships to, and definitions of nature may increase in the future, as this tension grows stronger.

## V. CONCLUSION

One afternoon in November 2015, after the end of daylight saving time had shortened the California day by an hour, I took a hike in the Santa Barbara foothills to watch the sun set. It had been over a year since the last time I had hiked Rattlesnake Canyon, above Mission Canyon Road and Skofield

Park. Rattlesnake is one of the area's most well-trodden trails and I had hiked it myself to its junction with the mountainous Gibraltar Road numerous times. This time my fieldwork for this master's thesis had me attuned to details I had given little attention on previous



**Figure 8: The sun setting over Santa Barbara, as seen from Rattlesnake Canyon.**

hikes. Within the first mile from the trailhead, the path descends to cross a creek that a Santa Barbara hiking website says “almost always [has] plenty of water,” but this time it was completely dry. I hurried quickly up the first real climb of the trail to get a nice vantage point for the sunset that was coming quickly. When I sat down and took in a view of the whole city stretching out to the coastline, I thought about Santa Barbara's natural aesthetic, its famed scenic beauty. This was a useful exercise for me because it reminded me of what



makes it so easy to accept Santa Barbara's aesthetic as something intrinsic, an inherent visual quality of the landscape. "It really is beautiful," I thought. The most prominent aspects of this particular view were the contours of the physical geography itself, not the visible results of human activity within it.

Even this baseline for thinking about nonhuman nature is ultimately a specifically human and cultural one though. The vistas that Rattlesnake Canyon offers are curated products of human intervention. I would not have had that particular view of the sun setting over Santa Barbara if a partnership between the Forest Service and the City Parks Department had not created and maintained Santa Barbara's hiking trails, including Rattlesnake Canyon, which is easily accessible by car. And besides, this all-encompassing, birds-eye view is not representative of how people experience this city the vast majority of the time. Even those Santa Barbarans who hike regularly, who have to be a small minority of the population anyway, only have this perspective when they take to the mountains. In the course of their daily lives, they, like the non-hikers in the city, experience Santa Barbara on a much more micro scale. This is why human activity and culture has such tremendous impact on perceptions of nature. It is also why those perceptions can so often belie conditions of ecological crisis that are visible on hiking trails, like the dry creek beds and parched plant life on the hillside. And furthermore, it is also what allows for an infinite number of unique conceptions of the city at large, each derived from the variegated perspectives within Santa Barbara, from different class, social and cultural positions and from different neighborhoods.

These micro-scale interactions that are the basis for Santa Barbarans' imagination of nature are likewise the source of assumptions about and understandings of the physical area in which they live. In other words, Santa Barbara residents' ideas about nature are important contributing factors to how they conceive of Santa Barbara as a place. Santa Barbara offers

multiple different possible experiences of nature, but I assert that, given the intense management and development of a plant aesthetic that I have described in this thesis, the one that holds a dominant, hegemonic position defines nature as a commodity. This is the conception of nature that characterizes the attitudes and actions of the area's wealthy with respect to the nonhuman world, and it is also the way Santa Barbara sells itself as an Edenic oasis to potential tourists. Santa Barbara's aesthetics of nature rely heavily on plants that have been imported to the region for specifically ornamental purposes, like the tall palm trees dotting the coastline. These are typically plants that signify "lush," in a way that the native plant life that grows in this semiarid region does not. The city's nature aesthetic is, in effect, the production and commodification of pervasive conceptions of nature as something external to human society that has a therapeutic or life-giving property. The human enterprises of landscape architecture and city planning bring a piece of that external nature into the urban. Santa Barbarans' experiences of nature in these terms engender ideas about Santa Barbara as a place that are essentially founded on distortions of the realities of the area's climate, especially when it comes to how much rainfall Santa Barbara gets.

This aesthetic is produced on large and small scales, in many different locations around town, and by multiple industries and agencies. The city's Parks and Recreation Department manages the aesthetic look of the entire city through the maintenance of its urban forest. That maintenance includes the bureaucratic planning of the forest with the Street Tree Master Plan, as well as the physical labor on the part of Urban Forest Superintendent Timothy Downey's team of employees that goes into caring for each of the city's thousands of individual trees. This department also maintains city parks like Alice Keck and Oak Park, which, especially in the case of the former, means carefully choreographing concentrated, smaller-scale experiences of nature. Additionally, the landscape architecture industry brings

nature to private property, creating and curating the exterior aesthetic appearance of residential areas. For them the same principles of guiding their selection of specific plants apply. In general this adds up to the lush, typically green plant aesthetic that I described above.

My interviews revealed the widespread hold of this aesthetic on the collective imagination of the area, but also the increasing visibility of the contradictions inherent in its production in Santa Barbara. For Downey's Parks Department, the continual production of nature is the overarching goal of their entire operation. This much is clear in the criteria they use to define success, and the things Downey himself takes pride in, such as Santa Barbara's exceptionally high tree density. The successes of Downey and his team have made the conception of Santa Barbara as a densely green forest an almost common sense one, even though the forest in question is human-made, and is threatened by the drought and climate change. The aesthetic that signifies nature in Santa Barbara, that Downey's department has had such a strong hand in creating, has such potency to residents that it is evoked to rally support for policy initiatives like Katie Davis's Measure P. It was no surprise that Davis's group, the Water Guardians, used nature imagery to appeal to environmentalist ethics residents may carry. But when the No on P campaign used the same aesthetic to rally support for the oil industry, it became clear how vague the moral sensibilities are that the aesthetic appeals to, how malleable it is as far as the ends towards which it might be employed, and thus how flimsy its connection to either a thoughtful consideration of ecology or environmental issues probably is. Downey is learning similar lessons about the contradictions regarding Santa Barbara's aestheticized nature, but his are more practical ones that are more directly connected to the drought. He is finding that the terms of success (including goals for the number of trees planted and removed) of maintaining a certain city-

wide plant aesthetic are becoming increasingly incongruous with physical conditions as the drought wears on. His team has had to cease planting new trees while they have seen old ones succumb to drought conditions, which adds up to steady changes to the city-wide plant aesthetic so deeply embedded in the consciousness of Santa Barbarans.

Downey's struggles to maintain the urban forest's status quo, and the battle for hegemony over environmentalist imagery in the Measure P campaign are parallel developments to broader changes occurring in many Santa Barbara residents' attitudes towards the town's nature aesthetic as they take on the task of conserving water. The city's Water Conservation Coordinator, Madeline Ward, describes a shift in conceptions of morality with respect to environmental issues, in the particular context of the "Gold is the New Green" campaign. As a quintessential aspect of the aesthetic associated with environmentalism, it is easy to universally and uncritically equate "green" with "environmentally friendly." That assumption is being challenged by many in Santa Barbara, though. This is evidenced both by Madeline Ward's account of the "Gold is the New Green" campaign and the several times it came up organically in my field interviews. Many interviewees expressed some sort of resentment towards residents who maintain green lawns or lush, landscaped exteriors during the drought. Andrea, with whom I spoke in Oak Park, in particular indicated that residents might be making these kinds of evaluations about fellow Santa Barbarans based specifically on the visual evidence that the appearance of their homes provide. In other words, some Santa Barbarans are viewing commodified nature differently, more critically. Without knowing the individual people involved, or the specific details of their water use, many react to a green lawn or a landscaped yard with more suspicion, or even disdain, than reverence. Accordingly, many are also following the lead of Ward's Water Conservation Program and letting their grass dry up.

All of this suggests two things about the way Santa Barbarans have experienced the drought on a large scale. First, the drought has accounted for significant changes to the plant aesthetic around town. This “de-greening” of Santa Barbara that the drought has brought has happened in the form of intentional choices made by residents in the interest of water conservation, as well as the changes to the Parks Department’s operating procedure. This has the potential to have profound effects on Santa Barbara residents’ conception of their city as a place. Secondly, the drought may provide both the necessary and sufficient conditions for a sea change in the relationship between Santa Barbara’s culture and nature. The drought has worsened and exposed the inherent ecological contradictions in the area’s commodified brand of nature, and in response to this some people are reconsidering their values with respect to the concept, their general environmental sensibilities, to try to be more in touch with the needs of the local ecology. If this ultimately falls short of a full-fledged reversal of commodified nature as the dominant terms in which Santa Barbarans order their interactions with the nonhuman world, it at least will likely have lasting effects on the particular ways in which commodified nature can be packaged and presented in the area. The celebration of rainless days and weeks in Santa Barbara, of the kind noted in the introduction of this thesis, are becoming less normalized. Likewise, there is a growing cultural sentiment that Santa Barbara’s urban nature should better reflect the physical area’s climatic and ecological conditions than it does, and it is the drought that has convinced many of this.

At the individual scale, experiences of the drought are sharply differentiated though. Interviewees at Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden had few intense, personal accounts of ways in which the drought had affected their lives. The way parkgoers experience nature at Alice Keck offers insights into why this might be. Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden is a

spectacle of commodified nature, which paradoxically exists only thanks to human planning and labor, yet is presented in a manner that obscures these so as to appear “natural.” Patrons may be conscious of the fact that the park is a product of human enterprise, but it is presented in a way that encourages people to suspend their disbelief as much as possible (like the way I had never, prior to this project, considered the labor and infrastructure required to build Alice Keck’s pond and streams). Parkgoers enjoy the nature that Alice Keck offers as an entity external to them, which is the same way that many of them conceive of the drought in relation to their lives. They may do their part to help conserve water, but the material conditions of their lives remain relatively unaffected by the drought. As I have written in the sections above, the consumption of commodified nature functions as a demonstration of a form of cultural capital. In a sense, Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden, a public park, offers the experience of nature favored by the area’s enormously wealthy elite to a less affluent demographic. Even still, it largely serves a class demographic with a “taste” for nature that carries a degree of cultural capital. The “distance from necessity” inherent to that class position entails a concurrent “distance” from the effects of the drought. It allows them to maintain a comfortable level of abstraction from the direct impact the drought has had on the biophysical area.

Across town at Oak Park things are different. As I have written, the terms of engagement with the nonhuman world that Oak Park offers are in sharp contrast with those at Alice Keck. Oak Park’s nature experience is a less commodified one, yet so many of the people with whom I spoke there were directly involved in the production of the type of nature that parkgoers at Alice Keck enjoy. By and large my interviewees at Oak Park lacked the comfortable distance from the drought’s effects that parkgoers at Alice Keck had. The landscape architecture workers that I interviewed in Oak Park all had examples of

significant, concrete ways the drought had affected their lives, and all of these were directly related to these residents' occupations. Their livelihoods are reliant on the conditions of the labor market in the industry of the production of commodified nature. The drought has been a shock to that industry, as it has shifted the dynamics of the consumption side of the market by forcing people to more deeply consider the environmental implications of the plant aesthetic that Santa Barbara has long favored. This has left many laborers in that industry wanting for waged work and struggling to make financial ends meet.

Interestingly, the only people I interviewed for this project who were conscious of the dynamics of this market and aware of the impact it has on some Santa Barbara residents' lives were the landscaping employees themselves. To understand this we have to remember the ideological, and supposed physical separation from "society" that is so central to popular, idealized concepts of nature. A key assumption guiding these cultural attitudes about the nonhuman world, and likewise a key assumption guiding the process of their commodification in Santa Barbara in the form of a plant aesthetic, is that nature is something fundamentally external to the realm of society or human activity. There is a pervasive, deeply-rooted idea that getting in touch with that external world will offer a boon to our health, whether physical, spiritual, or otherwise. The landscaping industry, the city Parks department, and other actors have endeavored to bring those benefits to the city. Even when there are glaring examples of the ways urban nature is connected to and even vitally dependent on human agency and labor, our working understanding of nature is that it exists outside the boundaries of society and so we suspend our disbelief. This is a key part of what makes the hardships of the laborers who produce Santa Barbara's commodified nature invisible to those who consume it. When asked about who the drought has affected, many

residents do not connect these dots, because they are not used to thinking of aesthetic nature as connected to labor at all.

The plight of Santa Barbara landscape workers as a result of the drought ought to make us consider broadening our conception of Environmental Justice issues and the factors we look for when identifying them. The case I have explored here does not fit neatly into the category of straightforward resource distribution imbalance, or that of a prototypical instance of environmental racism related to conditions like proximity to toxic waste dumps, for example. It also does not perfectly fit the mold of EJ concerns related to disaster, where the burden of a storm or fire or landslide falls disproportionately on the backs of a marginalized community. Instead, the experience of Santa Barbara landscape workers during the drought has elements of each of these. They have certainly borne an unfair brunt of the drought, and race is an important reason why, but there are mediating factors here that are not present in other cases of environmental injustice. Rather than being directly harmed by the drought, in the same way poor black neighborhoods were directly harmed by Hurricane Katrina, for instance, the Santa Barbara Latino population is harmed *indirectly* by the drought, in the form of under- and unemployment. This is a material impact, but rather than being caused by the drought alone, it has been caused by a response to the drought that is specifically linked to the overall cultural consciousness of the city, or the prevailing structure of feeling around nature. The political economy of commodified nature, and the form of radicalized wage labor on which it relies in Santa Barbara created the necessary conditions for a case of environmental injustice that in turn got its sufficient conditions when a historically bad drought struck. Scholars interested in EJ ought to be increasingly cognizant about how our cultural ideas of nature might have these kinds of material, lived consequences in conjunction with the various forms of ecological crisis that climate change is sure to bring.



Another important conclusion to draw from this project is that, yes, there are contradictions in the way our ideas about nature have been embodied in Santa Barbara's plant aesthetic, but those contradictions persist in the very approaches with which some have tried to respond to them. The thinking behind the "gold is the new green" campaign, and behind more general shifts in Santa Barbarans' attitudes about the aesthetics of nature, interrogates the ecological contradictions of cultivating water-intensive plants in a semiarid, and now drought-stricken climate. However, that response to the drought overlays and has even worsened the social contradictions of aesthetic nature, and thus has had unintended and largely unnoticed effects on a subset of the population, namely laborers in the landscaping industry. At the risk of belaboring the point, I think it is important to emphasize that the environmental and social contradictions in commodified nature are connected. Nature is bought and sold on the basis of an aesthetic preference of privileged class positions, but that aesthetic requires exploited labor to produce and maintain, especially when it is incongruent with the conditions of the local climate. This being the case, it is incumbent on those of us who consider ourselves environmentalists to take great caution in the ways we respond to the contradictions of aesthetic nature, by carefully considering the particular social conditions in which it is produced.

In his dissertation on the "cultural meaning of the tree," my friend and fellow environmental sociologist Neil Dryden grappled with this question of how to respond to the contradictions in our environmentalist sensibilities. Dryden (2012), whose dissertation includes an analysis of tree imagery on signs in Goleta and Santa Barbara, responds to what he sees as an unhealthy tendency towards kneejerk, universally positive associations with trees by declaring that he "hates" trees. Dryden acknowledges that in his heart of hearts he does not actually hate trees, but this is a rhetorical and political move that, because of the shock it

often inspires, opens a conversation that inspires more critical and thoughtful contemplation about the relationship between human society and the biophysical world than either absolutist position (hating or loving trees) typically invites. This is an important conversation to have, and it is important that both environmentally focused scholars and those outside the academy alike think as critically as possibly about this relationship. However, a lesson to be taken from my fieldwork in Alice Keck Park Memorial Garden and Oak Park is that this critical thinking should mean transcending simple value judgments about particular imaginations of “nature” or the aesthetics that evoke those imaginations. Of course, this is the direction Dryden intended the conversation he was starting to take, but it is important to be explicit about this since some Santa Barbarans certainly do seem to be reacting to the drought by reconsidering Santa Barbara’s nature aesthetic and rejecting it on a moral basis. “Gold is the new green,” could easily be logically transposed as “gold is the new good.”

So I will refrain from denouncing Santa Barbara “nature,” even as a strategic, rhetorical move like Dryden’s, because much of what makes it problematic transcends the intrinsic value of the aesthetic favored in the area, going straight to the city’s structural inequalities and the exploitation inherent in wage labor. An industry that meets the demand of a cultural preference for a particular nature aesthetic with the use of racialized, exploited labor is profoundly unjust, and it is equally unjust for the class of laborers in question to suffer for lack of work when the necessary and sufficient conditions arise for a shift in the demand the industry serves. Those are issues that cannot be solved by simple meditation on the aesthetics of nature by Santa Barbara’s white population and its middle and upper classes. Nevertheless, in coming to terms with the connections between those aesthetics and structural inequality, environmentalist scholars and Santa Barbara residents ought to be

increasingly aware, and increasingly suspicious of the ways idealized nature is commodified. Currently, nature is dependent on the exploited labor of workers like the ones I interviewed. I still believe that nature could be reimagined for Santa Barbara in a way that is more in touch with the biophysical realities of the area, while implicitly opposing exploitation and hierarchy rather than being complicit in them.

This would mean considering the role of nature in the context of conversations about broader emancipatory projects dealing with Santa Barbara's issues of racial justice and class inequality at a structural level. But it is possible to imagine nature not as a commodified aesthetic, but the opportunity for engagement with one's biophysical surroundings, an opportunity worth fighting for. Access to nature, commodified or otherwise, is currently reserved overwhelmingly for those with the most social and economic power in Santa Barbara. Being a working-class Santa Barbara resident, even one who works in the production of commodified nature, typically means having different practical restrictions placed on your own access to nature. These restrictions come in the form of demands on one's time (work) that preclude having leisure time to get outside and enjoy parks, beaches, mountain trails, etc. They also come in the form of the characteristics of the most affordable areas to live in Santa Barbara, which are geographically removed from the "scenic" parts of town like the coastline and mountains, as well as municipally managed parks. Any push for a more equal distribution of access to nature would necessarily involve a reimagination of the concept as something less commodified, less dependent on exploitation. Such a reimagination could be an important part of a broader effort to make a more just city by attending to its myriad social justice battlegrounds.

In his influential defense of narrative in the writing of history, William Cronon (1992) commented that the use of narrative gives scholarly work a format with a somewhat artificial

beginning, middle, and end. For the historian, the timeline of these component parts is largely a matter of personal choice, one that affords him or her a great amount of control over the presentation of the history in question by allowing them to make conscious decisions about what events and players might be included or excluded. On the other hand, to write ethnographic, rather than historical narrative is to have the beginning, middle, and end of the narrative form more or less decided for you, as the scope of this project's narrative was more or less dictated by the timeline of my ethnographic fieldwork. As a study of nature in Santa Barbara it focuses on the moment in the city's environmental/cultural history during which the actual research took place, namely California's drought.

As such, there is a great deal of potential work still to be done on this topic in follow up projects. Even in the time I have been writing this, an event of interest to the project has occurred, as the El Niño weather pattern has brought multiple rainstorms to Santa Barbara in the span of a few weeks. While El Niño will likely not solve the water crisis on its own, it will regardless present new possibilities for changes in Santa Barbara's relationship to nature, and will warrant follow up research. In addition, this project has dealt with many complex dynamics and relationships within Santa Barbara, all of which could be explored in more depth. Not the least of these are the political economy of the production of commodified nature in Santa Barbara, and the particular experiences of the city's Latino population during the drought. Finally, as anthropogenic climate change continues to intensify globally, and as the percentage of the world's population that lives in cities grows, the ways different societies imagine nature in urban settings around the world will be an increasingly important topic of study. The story of urban nature, and urban nature in ecological crisis especially, is a rich and complex tapestry with a global scope, and Santa

Barbara, California is at the very heart of it. I have no doubt that the lessons of the drought in this Southern California “paradise” will have wide-reaching, rippling implications for stories yet to unfold in any number of different corners of the world.

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## TABLES

**Table 1. List of Interviewees.**

Name of Interviewee	Date	Location
Madeline Ward	6/23/2015	City of Santa Barbara Conference Room
Timothy Downey	6/24/2015	Parks and Recreation Office
Katie Davis	10/14/2015	Camino Real Shopping Center
Maria Gordon	9/2/2015	Alice Keck Park Memorial Gardens
Robert Funai	9/5/2015	Alice Keck Park Memorial Gardens
Christina Wilson	9/6/2015	Alice Keck Park Memorial Gardens
Bob (No Last Name Given)	9/6/2015	Alice Keck Park Memorial Gardens
Sean Sinclair	9/6/2015	Alice Keck Park Memorial Gardens
Jesus Nuñez-Flores	9/9/2015	Alice Keck Park Memorial Gardens
Evelia (No Last Name Given)	10/26/2015	Oak Park
Hector (No Last Name Given)	10/26/2015	Oak Park
Andrea (No Last Name Given)	10/26/2015	Oak Park
Igineo (No Last Name Given)	11/22/2015	Oak Park
Jesus (No Last Name Given)	11/22/2015	Oak Park
Cleo (No Last Name Given)	11/22/2015	Oak Park