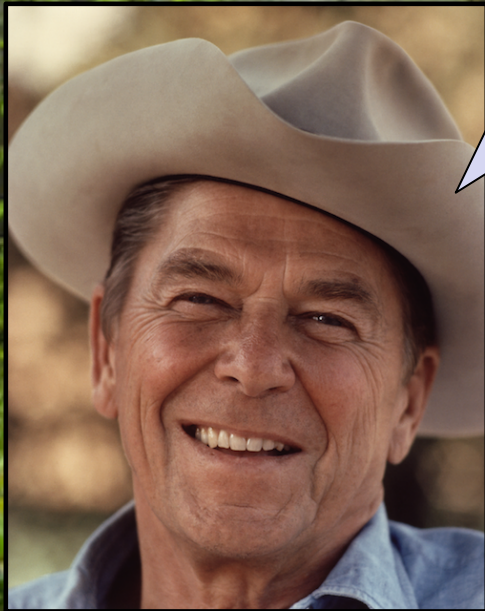


What's Wrong with Plastic Trees?

What's Wrong with Ronald Reagan?

A tree's a tree. How many more redwoods do you need to look at? If you've seen one, you've seen them all.



What's Wrong with Plastic Trees?

At the conclusion of his essay, Martin Krieger writes:

“What’s wrong with plastic trees? My guess is that there is very little wrong with them. Much more can be done with plastic trees and the like to give most people the feeling that they are experiencing nature.” (p. 453c3)

What's Wrong with Plastic Trees?

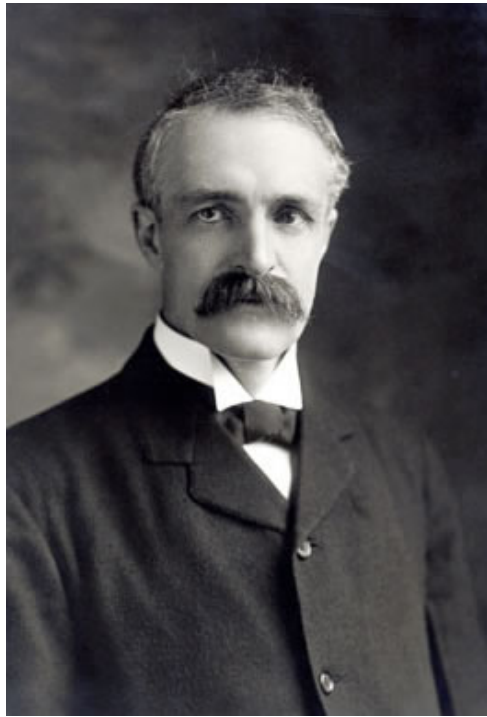


Las Vegas
Cell phone tower



Los Angeles, 1972
Median strip of a boulevard

Conservation vs Preservation



Gifford Pinchot
1865-1914



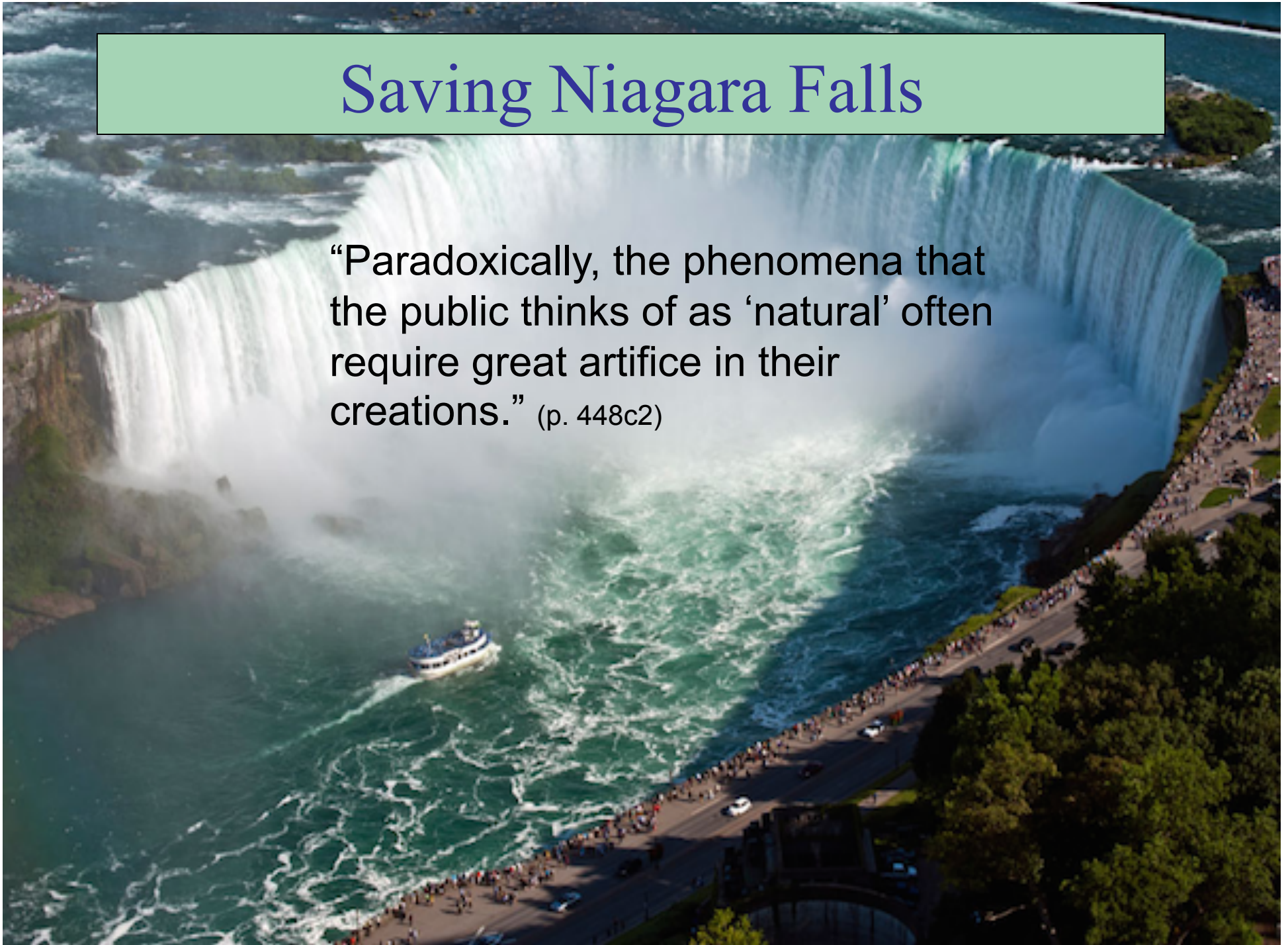
Teddy Roosevelt in Yosemite
1903



John Muir
1838-1914

Saving Niagara Falls

“Paradoxically, the phenomena that the public thinks of as ‘natural’ often require great artifice in their creations.” (p. 448c2)



Saving Niagara Falls



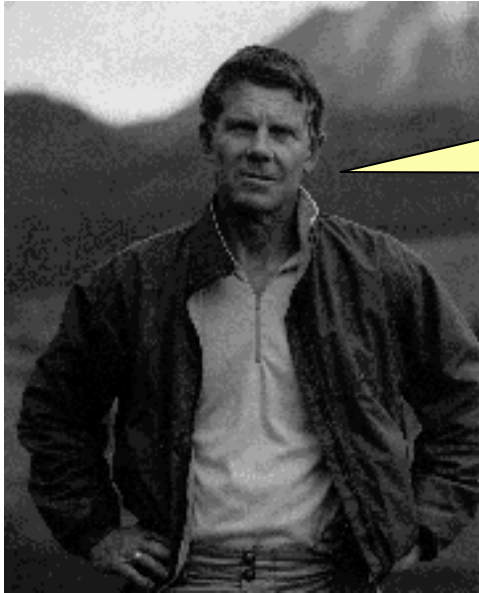
The American Falls (with water)

Saving Niagara Falls



The American Falls (without water, 1969)

What is Wilderness?



Roderick Nash,
author of *Wilderness and
the American Mind* (1967)

Wilderness is a
state of mind.

“A wilderness is not discovered in the sense that some man from a civilization looked upon a piece of territory for the first time. It is the meaning that we attach to such a piece of territory that converts it to a wilderness. [...] The wilderness, as we think of it now, is the product of a political effort to give a special meaning to a biological system organized in a specific way.” (p. 448c2)

When is Something Rare?

- “Objects become rare when a large number of people change their attitudes toward them.” (p. 448c3)
- “Knowledge serves an important function in the creation of rare environments.”
- “Advertising is one means of changing states of knowledge.” (p. 449c1)

Four mechanisms for creating a rare object: (p. 449c2)

- (1) Designate the object as rare.
- (2) Differentiate it from other objects of the same sort.
- (3) Establish its significance.
- (4) Determine its position in the context of society.

But not everything rare is worth preserving.

Reasons for Preservation

- (1) **Luxury**: wilderness as worth preserving for its own sake
- (2) **Necessity**: wilderness needed for ecological services
- (3) **Merit**: good for humans to be exposed to wilderness

But it may often be more **cost effective** to create new rare environments than to preserve current environments.

“The advertising that created rare environments can also create plentiful substitutes.” (p. 451c1)

These substitutes can be available to more people and at a lower cost.

The Environment and Social Justice

“A *summum bonum* of preserving trees has no place in an ethic of social justice.” (p. 453c2)

There is a fundamental tension between:

Spending and Saving
Conservation and Preservation
The Poor and The Wealthy

Changing Preferences to Maximize Efficiency

“I still feel quite uncomfortable with with what I have said here. [...] By manipulating attitudes, we have levers for intervening into what is ordinarily considered fixed and uncontrollable. But to what end?

Our ability to manipulate preferences and values tends to lead to **systems that make no sense.**” (p. 453c1-2)

“**What’s wrong with plastic trees?** My guess is that there is very little wrong with them. Much more can be done with plastic trees and the like to give most people the feeling that they are experiencing nature.” (p. 453c3)

Environmental Economics

The Main Question: Can economic policy decide environmental policy?

Further Questions: Does the market system...

- ... provide the most just distribution of resources?
- ... adequately protect human health and safety?
- ... recognize environmental values?