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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
STEPHEN T. MATHER, DIRECTOR

# ORGANIZED POPULAR EDUCATION

ADDRESS :: By ARTHUR E. BESTOR  
*President Chautauqua Institution*

DELIVERED AT THE NATIONAL PARKS CONFERENCE  
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## ORGANIZED POPULAR EDUCATION.

By ARTHUR E. BESTOR, President Chautauqua Institution.

The National Parks Conference has no more important task than the organization of such machinery as will bring to the people of America the knowledge of their unsurpassed heritage in the national parks and an earnest desire to enjoy them as individuals. Speaking on behalf of Chautauqua Institution, for two generations one of the great centers for popular education and one of the first places where the parks as national playgrounds were brought to the attention of the American people on a large scale, I can assure you of our readiness to put at your disposal all of our facilities for publicity and all of our agencies for the influencing of public opinion.

Our problem, strange to say, has not been unlike the one in which we are interested in this conference. Chautauqua has had to induce people to leave their comfortable homes in all parts of the country; has had to provide for all their physical as well as mental, spiritual, and recreational needs; had had to maintain them in safety, health, and comfort; had had to see that their environment was such that they could work out their social and intellectual salvation in comfort and happiness. We have succeeded in building up the unique center for popular education of the world, partly because we have successfully met the same needs that face you in connection with the national parks. We are still under the necessity of taking into account railroad rates and transportation problems, sustenance, and sanitary arrangements, and of carrying on publicity on a national scale.

There are great interests involved in this conference which do not concern themselves with my particular topic—how the parks shall be administered, how influence shall be brought to bear on Congress for their maintenance and development, what advantage shall be taken of them by scientific and educational organizations, what shall be the relationship of the National Park Service and the National Parks Association to other organizations. But all those who are interested in any of these questions will do well to remember that all are equally concerned in the problem of the education of the mass of the people with reference to the parks.

How to make our citizens aware of their priceless possessions; how to substitute America for Europe as the travel field for lovers

of magnificent scenery and natural beauty; how to make "See America first" a national slogan; how to create a desire and an ideal—these are the problems with which we are concerning ourselves.

Comparisons while odious seem always necessary for our human understanding. Some lovers of our national parks seem to have adopted as their slogan some such phrase as "Substitute America for Switzerland" and to conceive their task as the turning of travel from the Old World to our own country. There are certain difficulties inherent in such a task which we ought frankly to face. Compared with Switzerland we have not as yet many of the facilities which make travel there so great a delight. Government-owned railroads; hotels and inns along every road and at the end of every trail; organization of an entire nation for the convenience of tourists; expense adjusted to every desire; ease of access to centers of population; historical, literary, and romantic associations—all these and not merely scenery alone make the charm of Switzerland and other parts of out-of-door Europe.

If we are really desirous of making the national parks known to the American people we must face these difficulties:

(1) Distance from centers of population especially from those parts of the country lacking the grandeur and uniqueness of scenery offered by the national parks. The expense of travel is a considerable item in the vacation budget of all of us. In Europe all travel is organized on the basis of first, second, and third class, which most of us take advantage of in Europe, but are rather ashamed to use in America.

(2) Expense: This, of course, varies with personal taste, but there are thousands of people who will never visit the parks because it seems too expensive an undertaking, but who really could afford the trip. Our literature must give better indication of the expenses of such trips adjusted to the economic necessities of various classes of travelers.

(3) Private exploitation: Too often in America, even where the Government owns and administers some historic or scenic site, we have left to private exploitation all the common necessities of life. Niagara Falls under the old individualistic system was almost unbearable. Public control and intelligent administration have made recent visits to the Falls a joyful experience. I am not attempting to discuss the whole problem of Government control, but it will add to the sum of national proprietorship if the Government can more and more actually administer to all our need in our own national playgrounds.

(4) Lack of romantic, literary, and historical associations: A fine beginning has been made in the National Parks portfolio in publish-

ing the legends and pioneer history. Our authors and painters and nature lovers can do much in creating a literary and artistic tradition for the parks.

(5) Largeness of the task: Any of us who are engaged in the task of public education know what a task such a propaganda involves in an individualistic society like ours. It is not merely that the human mind is so inveterately opposed to new ideas and that so many of us look to some country on the other side of the sea as our mother land, but that the work of giving a hundred million people even a minimum of knowledge is a vast work which challenges us by its very immensity.

What are some of the agencies at our disposal and organizations to be utilized?

(1) Organizations directly involved: In the railroads which reach the parks we have the most powerful and influential corporations of the country through which they pass. They have already carried on a great advertising campaign. I think now of the advertising of Glacier Park by the Great Northern and the Grand Canyon by the Santa Fe. I understand that more and more the railroads are carrying on a continuous advertising campaign to increase travel, are cooperating with each other and with the National Park Service, and that they stand ready to unite in every effort to make the parks better known.

(2) Personalities: In this movement we can count confidently on the support of all lovers of the out-of-doors, of all protectors of bird and animal life, of all conservationists of beauty and natural resources, of all students of geology and forestry, of all believers in the surpassing natural beauty of their native land. And all these will devote themselves to this labor of love because they are working not for individual gain but for the joy of the task and in a common understanding with others who have the same unselfish spirit.

(3) Publicity: We are creating a literature. John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, Enos Mills, William T. Hornaday, and others have shown us the way. More and more newspapers and periodicals will give attention to the parks and their development. The associated clubs have done a tremendous piece of work in connection with the problem of national security. They might well have their attention called to the possibility of a nation-wide propaganda for the national parks as one of their next tasks. Every patriotic organization should have this patriotic opportunity called to their attention.

(4) Universities, colleges, and scientific societies: Their leaders will more and more look to the national parks as laboratories, as opportunities for scientific research and as the most ideal centers for combined vacation and education.

(5) Motion pictures: How wonderfully this most widespread of our modern approaches to millions of people lends itself to propaganda for the national parks. We can reach the multitudes direct in no more effective way, and the people themselves will pay the bill.

(6) Chautauquas, lyceums, women's clubs: All these will respond to any such opportunity. It is only a question of how rapidly the National Park Service and the National Parks Association are prepared to supply slides and motion pictures to cooperate with lecturers and programs committees. Every chautauqua auditorium and lyceum hall and clubhouse and school building will be open if approach is made with national appeal.

(7) Schools: The distinguished Commissioner of Education has doubtless pointed out how the educational system of the country can be utilized. Those who have access to publishers of textbooks will see to it that even a disproportionate attention is given to the national parks in the next few years in the books which are in the curriculum of our elementary and intermediate and high schools. An exhibit of national-park pictures should be available for every school willing to place the exhibit and use the profits for purchase of some of the pictures themselves. Alongside copies of the old masters and European pictures, some of the fine photographs of the national parks should be in every school of the country.

Our work is to create such an organization as can simultaneously take advantage of all these avenues of approach. Our task is stupendous because so many opportunities are at our hand. Our propaganda yields itself to every agency for popular education and democratic organization and national publicity; it relates itself to every organization of a patriotic character; it links itself to every movement in which we are most deeply interested at the present time, conservation, preparedness, Americanization; it challenges us to an individual and collective task of the utmost importance and far-reaching value in our common national life.







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