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National History Day Guide

GRAND CANYON

Conservation

National History Day: Rights and Responsibilities (2024–2025)

GRAND CANYON

America's national parks raise important questions about rights and responsibilities in history. There is much to consider about our rights and responsibilities toward natural resources, Indigenous communities, and future generations. The story of the Grand Canyon is a prime example of how rights were challenged during the formation of a national park. For example, it challenged the right of the president to have final say on issues of stewardship and the rights of Native Americans to occupy land where they have lived for thousands of years. It also led to questions about responsibilities, such as the government's responsibility to preserve land for future generations.

During Theodore Roosevelt's presidency, Congress established five national parks. However, Roosevelt was frustrated by the lack of tools available to the president for conservation efforts. While Roosevelt used the Forest Reserve Act of 1891 to significantly increase the number of national forests, the power to create national parks resided with Congress. While Presidents Harrison, Cleveland, McKinley, and Roosevelt had collectively established 159 national forests, Congress had authorized only eleven national parks during the same time period.

To aid his conservation efforts, Theodore Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act into law on June 8, 1906. This act gave the president—not Congress—executive power to establish national monuments, which would be smaller in geographic area than national parks. Roosevelt used the Antiquities Act to great effect, naming 18 national monuments, starting with Devil's Tower in Wyoming. Since 1906, 165 national monuments have been established, but some have been abolished or reduced over the years.

Meanwhile, the Grand Canyon had been rejected for national park status three times since 1882. Roosevelt made his first visit to the Grand Canyon in 1903 and spoke about the necessity of preserving the area. Armed with the Antiquities Act, he declared the Grand Canyon a national monument in January 1908.

The bill establishing Grand Canyon National Park did not pass until 1919, the year of Roosevelt's death; however, his attempt to bypass Congress set a precedent for future presidents to use for conservation efforts. For example, Roosevelt's fifth cousin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, fought with Congress over the Jackson Hole Monument approved by FDR. Congress overturned his Jackson Hole executive order, but FDR vetoed the bill.

National History Day: Grand Canyon

Theodore Roosevelt's broad use of the Antiquities Act was reflective of his progressive views on the power of the presidency: "My belief was that it was not only [the president's] right but his duty to do anything that the needs of the nation demanded unless such action was forbidden by the Constitution or by the laws. . . . I did not usurp power, but I did greatly broaden the use of executive power," he said in 1913.

The political side of the Grand Canyon's history raises questions about the rights of a president as well as the government's responsibility to preserve land. Meanwhile, the effects of European settlers on the Native Americans who lived in the Grand Canyon area pose questions about different communities' rights to land and the government's responsibility toward those communities.

There are currently eleven tribes that have connections to land within Grand Canyon National Park. Three of those tribes, the Navajo, Havasupai, and Hualapai, have reservations that currently border the Grand Canyon. The Havasupai tribe, which is possibly the tribe most commonly associated with the Grand Canyon, has been in the region for over 1,000 years. They migrated between two main living areas: Havasu Canyon, which is in the western area of the Grand Canyon, and the Coconino Plateau, which extends from the Grand Canyon's south rim.

The first recorded European to encounter the Havasupai was Padre Francisco Tomas Garces on June 20, 1776. Following the American Civil War, the Havasupai began to experience the full effects of European colonization due to the federal government's land and mining policies. By the time Grand Canyon National Park was established in 1919, the Havasupai were restricted to a small reservation at the bottom of the canyon. This location interfered with their cyclical migration patterns.

Representatives from the Havasupai tribe, such as C. H. Gensler, voiced their concerns to the federal government with how the National Park boundaries were affecting the Havasupai. They refused the government's offer to sell the land back to the Havasupai at market value. In 1975, Congress returned 180,000 acres of land to the Havasupai, forming the Havasupai Reservation. While examining the sources, consider whether the president's responsibilities toward conservation gives them the right to bypass Congress. Consider the government's right to conserve the Grand Canyon as a national park, taking into account both their responsibility to protect land for future generations and their responsibilities toward Native Americans living in the Grand Canyon region.

The 2024–2025 National History Day theme focuses on rights and responsibilities. The story of the Grand Canyon is an excellent illustration of a historical event that addresses these big questions. Theodore Roosevelt viewed conservation as a vital responsibility of the government, but questions were raised about his rights as a president when he used the Antiquities Act to establish the Grand Canyon as a national monument. When the Grand Canyon was finally established as a national park in 1919, the park's boundaries took land from Native American tribes such as the Havasupai. Their way of life was completely changed, and they were forced onto a small reservation within the national park. The Havasupai's loss of land raised further questions about Native Americans' rights to land and the government's responsibilities toward tribes.

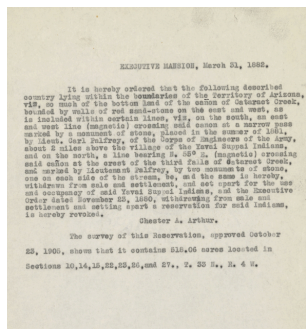
Primary sources pertaining to Theodore Roosevelt and the Grand Canyon are available in collections across the country. Students and teachers can find 9 pages of primary sources in the [Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library](#) related exclusively to the Grand Canyon. **This resource packet includes 14 primary sources related to Theodore Roosevelt and the Grand Canyon.**

National History Day: Grand Canyon

1 Transcript of Chester A. Arthur Executive Order Assigning Lands to the Havasupai Tribe



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Source 1 is an executive order from Chester A. Arthur assigning lands to the Havasupai tribe. He states that an area of land in the Grand Canyon will be “withdrawn from sale and settlement, and set apart for the use and occupancy of said Yavai Suppai Indians.”

DATE: 1882

CREATED BY: Chester A. Arthur

Courtesy of Arizona State University, Greater Arizona Collection, Senator Carl T. Hayden Papers

2 Havasupai: Indian couple in front of wickiup



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Source 2 is a photograph of a Havasupai couple outside of a wickiup, a semi-temporary living structure. Wickiups were the main structures the Havasupai lived in while migrating between the canyon and the plateau.

DATE: 1899

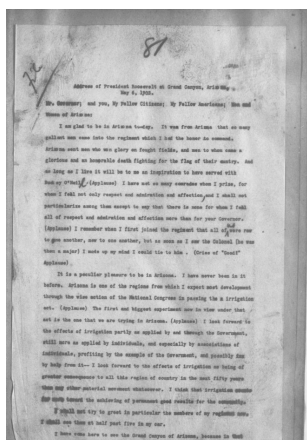
CREATED BY: George Wharton James

Courtesy of Northern Arizona University, Cline Library

3 Address of President Roosevelt at Grand Canyon, Arizona



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Source 3 is a speech given by Theodore Roosevelt during his first visit to the Grand Canyon. Roosevelt highlights Arizonans who participated in his regiment during the Spanish American War, talks about the future of irrigation in Arizona, and welcomes the “Indians” present. He asks the citizens to help preserve the Grand Canyon, saying, “Leave it as it is. You cannot improve on it; not a bit. The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it.”

DATE: 05/06/1903

CREATED BY: Theodore Roosevelt

Courtesy of Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University

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4 Bisbee Daily Review, Thursday, May 7, 1903



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Source 4 is a newspaper clipping from the Bisbee Daily Review in Bisbee, Arizona, about Theodore Roosevelt's visit to the Grand Canyon. The article states, "Should our soldier President fulfill in the future the hopes of those who trust him, today's event shall endure as splendid epoch in the world's history."

DATE: 05/07/1903 **CREATED BY:** Joe Chisholm

Courtesy of Newspapers.com

5 President Roosevelt Mounted for a Ride in the Grand Canyon, Arizona



[Download](#)



Source 5 is a photograph of Theodore Roosevelt mounted for a ride in the Grand Canyon. Roosevelt is riding a white horse, maneuvering through a crowd of tourists.

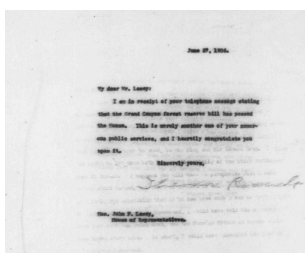
DATE: c. 06/11/1903 **CREATED BY:** Underwood & Underwood

Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University

6 Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to John F. Lacey



[Download](#)



Source 6 is a letter from Theodore Roosevelt to John F. Lacey congratulating Lacey on getting the Grand Canyon Forest Reserve bill through the House of Representatives.

DATE: 06/27/1906 **CREATED BY:** Theodore Roosevelt

Courtesy of Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University

7 Native American Seated on the Edge of the Grand Canyon, Arizona



[Download](#)



Source 7 is a photograph of a Native American seated on the edge of the Grand Canyon.

DATE: Between 1910 and 1925 **CREATED BY:** Unknown

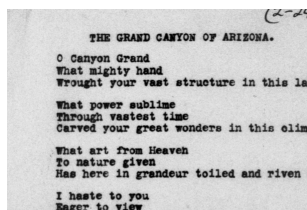
Courtesy of National Photo Company Collection (Library of Congress)

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8 The Grand Canyon of Arizona



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Source 8 is a poem by Martin J. Boutelle describing the majesty of the Grand Canyon.

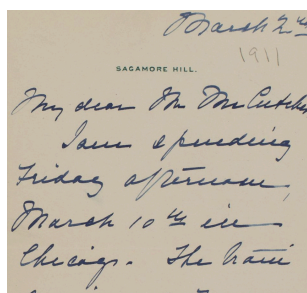
DATE: 02/24/1911 **CREATED BY:** Martin J. Boutelle

Courtesy of Library of Congress Manuscript Division, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University

9 Letter From Edith Kermit Carow Roosevelt to John T. McCutcheon



[Download](#)



Source 9 is a letter from Edith Kermit Carow Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt's wife, to John T. McCutcheon stating that she, her daughter Ethel, and her friend are traveling to Arizona to meet Theodore Roosevelt and to visit the Grand Canyon.

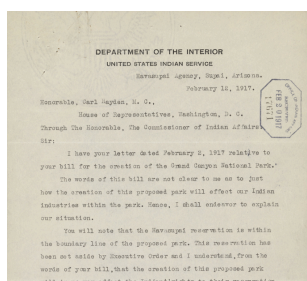
DATE: 03/02/1911 **CREATED BY:** Edith Kermit Carow Roosevelt

Courtesy of Newberry Library, Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Dickinson State University

10 Letter From C. H. Gensler, Havasupai Agency, to Carl Hayden



[Download](#)



Source 10 is a letter from C. H. Gensler of the Havasupai Agency to Carl Hayden. Gensler expresses his concern about the effects of the Grand Canyon National Park's boundaries on the Havasupai people.

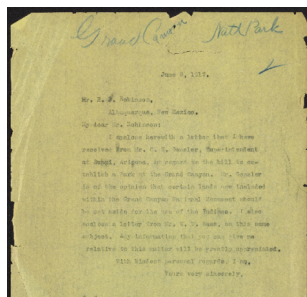
DATE: 02/12/1917 **CREATED BY:** C. H. Gensler

Courtesy of Arizona State University Library, Greater Arizona Collection, Senator Carl T. Hayden Papers

11 Letter From Carl Hayden to H. F. Robinson



[Download](#)



Source 11 is a letter from Carl Hayden to H. F. Robinson with attached notes from W. W. Bass and C. H. Gensler. Hayden solicits advice concerning the Havasupai Tribe's needs for grazing and access to natural resources.

DATE: 06/08/1917 **CREATED BY:** Carl T. Hayden

Courtesy of Arizona State University Library, Greater Arizona Collection, Senator Carl T. Hayden Papers

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12 Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona



[Download](#)



Source 12 is a map of Grand Canyon National Park. It denotes the park's boundaries, wagon roads, automobile roads, main trails, other trails, and a railroad. The map also shows the Havasupai Indian Reservation, the Coconino Plateau, the Kaibab Plateau, the Kaibab National Forest, and the Navajo Indian Reservation.

DATE: 1919

CREATED BY: Rand McNally and Company

Courtesy of Library of Congress Geography and Map Division

13 Eagle dancers at Grand Canyon, Arizona



[Download](#)



Source 13 is a photograph of Havasupai Eagle Dancers at the Grand Canyon. The photograph was taken between 1960 and 1970.

DATE: c. 1960–70

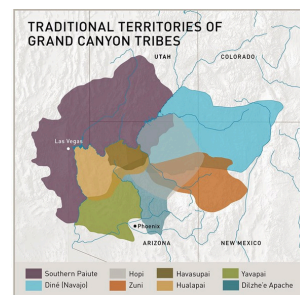
CREATED BY: Josef Muench

Courtesy of Northern Arizona University, Cline Library

14 Traditional Lands and Current Land Allocation Maps of the 11 Associated Tribes of the Grand Canyon Region



[Download](#)



Source 14 is two maps comparing traditional tribal lands in the Grand Canyon region with current reservations. The link leads to a page from the National Park Service, so you will need to scroll down to view the maps.

DATE: 06/11/2024

CREATED BY: Unknown

Courtesy of National Park Service

National History Day: Grand Canyon

IMPORTANT DATES

- **March 1, 1872:** Yellowstone becomes the first national park.
- **May 6, 1903:** Theodore Roosevelt makes his first visit to the Grand Canyon and asks the citizens to preserve the Grand Canyon (“Leave It As It Is” speech).
- **June 8, 1906:** Theodore Roosevelt signs the Antiquities Act, giving the president power to create national monuments.
- **January 11, 1908:** Theodore Roosevelt designates the Grand Canyon as a national monument (Presidential Proclamation 794).
- **February 26, 1919:** Congress establishes Grand Canyon National Park.
- **1975:** As part of the Grand Canyon National Park Enlargement Act, Congress returns 180,000 acres of land to the Havasupai, forming the Havasupai Reservation.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books/Documentaries

- Anderson, Michael F. *Living at the Edge: Explorers, Exploiters, and Settlers of the Grand Canyon Region*. Grand Canyon: Grand Canyon Association, 1998.
- Gessner, David. *Leave It As It Is: A Journey Through Theodore Roosevelt’s American Wilderness*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021.
- Harmon, David and Francis P. McManamon. *The Antiquities Act: A Century of American Archaeology, Historic Preservation, and Nature Conservation*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2006.
- Hirst, Stephen. *I Am the Grand Canyon: The Story of the Havasupai People*. Grand Canyon: Grand Canyon Association, 2007.
- Long, McKenzie. *This Contested Land: The Storied Past and Uncertain Future of America’s National Monuments*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2024.
- Shields, Kenneth Jr. *Images of America: The Grand Canyon, Native People and Early Visitors*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000.

Articles

- Lee, Ronald F. The Antiquities Act of 1906. US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1970. Accessed July 8, 2024. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/series.htm?id=0614BF17-E696-2C90-4D2B8CC9387F2CB4>.
- National Constitution Center Staff. “Theodore Roosevelt’s Bold Grand Canyon Move.” National Constitution Center. Last modified August 25, 2016. <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/theodore-roosevelts-bold-grand-canyon-move>.
- Righter, Robert W. “National Monuments to National Parks: The Use of the Antiquities Act of 1906.” National Park Service. Last modified March 5, 2005. <https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/hisnps/npshistory/righter.htm>.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What makes an area of land worthy of preserving?
- What rights does a president have to act without the consent of Congress (both in conservation and in other contexts?)
- What rights do people have regarding public lands? What responsibilities do the public have regarding conservation?
- What rights do Native Americans such as the Havasupai have to their ancestral land? What responsibilities do they take on as stewards of their land?
- What responsibilities does the federal government have toward Native Americans regarding land ownership?