

Cory Manning

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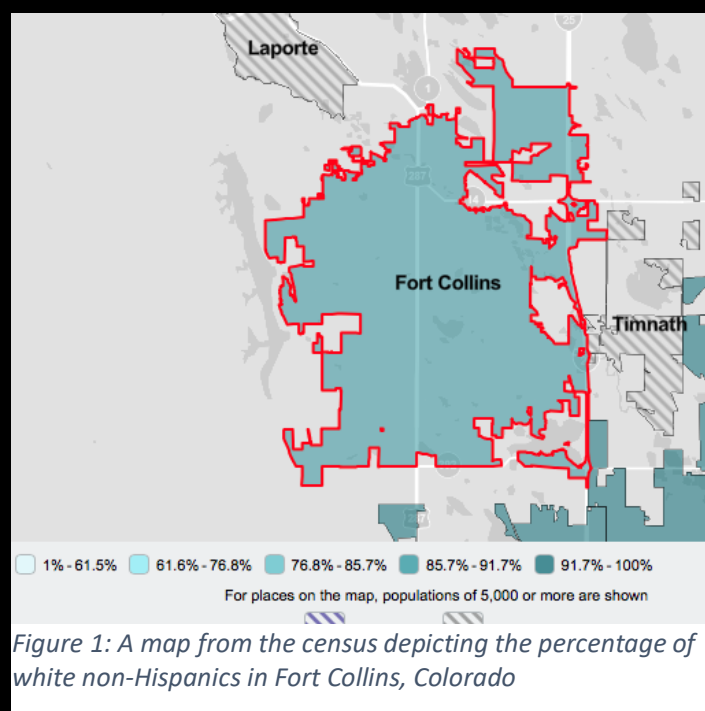
## Observations of Diversity as an Undergraduate Researcher

### Introduction

Fort Collins, Colorado is a place that I have been able to call home as I have had the privilege of earning my bachelor's degree in Ecosystem Science and Sustainability at Colorado State University (CSU). My years at Colorado State University have been some of the most important and challenging times that I have navigated, as they abruptly forced me to examine race and my social values more closely than I ever have before. Being that I am 21 years old and approaching the end of my undergraduate experience, this time has undoubtedly shaped my development as black man, a scientist, a researcher, a relationship builder, and an environmental justice activist. And almost nothing has informed that experience for me more than my opportunity to participate in urban conservation research under Veronica Champine and with my research partner Emily Jenkins.

### Research Implications

Our work focused on motivators and barriers people grapple with in regard to native plant gardening. We examined this through looking at over 1200 survey responses gathered by Veronica Champine and fellow researcher Megan Jones in partnership with Audubon Rockies and Nature in the City. The survey asked various questions about actions people have taken, plan to take, or will not take related to native plant gardening and responses consisted of people participating in gardening activities in the greater Fort Collins area. At the beginning of my work on this project, one thing I was curious



about was the demographic of those who were surveyed. I imagined that it would mainly consist of white people, as that is a direct reflection of who predominately lives in the Northern Colorado region as seen in figure 1. This suspicion was confirmed by my mentor, and this revelation got me thinking about the need for this information to include the experience of those underrepresented in the city of Fort Collins. One restriction about doing research in Fort Collins is the lack of diversity in the greater Fort Collins area. Despite this, I have acquired the impression that stakeholders of color in this area are often prioritized in ecological research unless being examined in an environmental injustice lens. The importance of urban conservation research reaching out to and examining the point of view of those underrepresented in the study area and areas like it is essential. Despite a lack of diversity, the outreach to and addressing of the various identities present still paints a clearer picture of the lifestyles, passions, and feelings that exist and differ in a given area of interest. Hauck et al. discusses the many ways to further encourage ecosystem service rhetoric as a conservation method, but looked into “all stakeholder groups, especially when many different actors with their different perceptions and needs are involved” being a great way to facilitate a change in behavior in favor of biodiversity and other conservation values (Hauck et al., 2013). Knowing the feelings, ways of life, practices, and values of a large swath of the different types of people living in a setting is an equitable way to ensure the addressing of all people who can potentially be impacted by decisions and work being done related to community.

## **Conclusion**

I know as a black person in a predominately white space, my experience in Fort Collins is a lot different than that of my white counterparts. Experiences including time on campus, living arrangement, working, education, and simply existing in various ways around the city are all a little different due to my identity. This experience is an important one to capture in research like that I participated in, as my perspective is one that also depicts life in Fort Collins. Urban conservation work that can be practiced and spread through the influence of people’s social circles is the key to a more broad and popularized sustainable community. That can only happen as representation in research broadens.

## References

Hauck, J., Görg, C., Varjopuro, R., Ratamáki, O., & Jax, K. (2013). Benefits and limitations of the ecosystem services concept in environmental policy and decision making: Some stakeholder perspectives. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 25, 13–21.

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