I’d like to start this off by saying that I am probably very biased, but I am also right.

National parks have always held an important place in my life. When I was a kid my family would go on road trips across the country to visit the Grand Canyon – partly because of their majesty but mostly because we were too poor to go to Disney land like the other kids – and those memories are what taught me to value the beauty of nature and care for the environment.

National Parks are some of the greatest natural features on the planet–stretching across miles–showcasing unique resources and natural features and show the hand of God at work. So imagine my surprise when I set my sights on visiting every national park and buy a checklist poster of every park and see the St. Louis Arch on it. It had to be a typo, so I hoped on my computer and sure enough, some politicians had slipped it in under my nose and had it made a national park. It was news to me as I’m sure its news to you now. It’s almost like they kept it a secret on purpose because they knew how wrong of an act it was. But first, what is the St. Louis Arch?

The St. Louis Arch AKA the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial AKA the Gateway Arch AKA that big metal thing was built in 1963 to commemorate the westward expansion in America and was made the be the Gateway to the west.

That’s it.

So, what was the problem? Apparently, *The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial*was just too hard of a name to remember and everyone kept calling it “The Saint Louis Arch.” It was fine for a while but it’s like that one teacher that always mispronounces your last name; you remind her a couple of times and she apologizes but keeps pronouncing it wrong. Eventually, you get tired of it and take the only logical step:

Change your whole name to something completely different.

The congressmen and women of Missouri banded together to get bill S. 1438 passed to rename the arch and tossed in the designation of National Park for good measure and with much more important things happening in the world of politics the bill was quickly passed with little dispute. But now we’re left with the question: Does it qualify as a national park? It may take pages, but I will guide you to the bottom of this question.

No.

Phew, that was easy. But if you don’t believe me, just ask the IUNC, or, the International Union for Conservation of Nature. They have laid out the international guidelines for what a National Park needs for recognition:

One or several ecosystems that are of special interest.

* 1. The highest competent authority of the country has taken steps to protect the area.
  2. Visitors are allowed to enter, under special conditions.
  3. A minimum size of 1,000 hectares.
  4. Statutory legal protection.
  5. Budget and staff sufficient to provide sufficient, effective protection.
  6. Prohibition of exploitation of natural resources.

I’ll save you the time of Googling it. Gateway Arch National Park meets few of these requirements. There is no natural ecosystem, the park is few blocks in the middle of downtown; the park is only 36.8 hectares, that’s 963.2 hectares short; there are absolutely no natural resources to protect. It’s just a large, man-made object in the middle of the city.

I’ll admit, IUNC is an international organization and doesn’t control US laws and policies so just because the international authority on parks and preservation says it, doesn’t mean Congress has to follow their guidelines. So, let’s look to the Department of the Interior and what they outlined for National Park designation.

To receive a favorable recommendation from the Service, a proposed addition to the national park system must (1) possess nationally significant natural or cultural resources, (2) be a suitable addition to the system, (3) be a feasible addition to the system, and (4) require direct NPS management instead of protection by other public agencies or the private sector. These criteria are designed to ensure that the national park system includes only the most outstanding examples of the nation’s natural and cultural resources. These criteria also recognize that there are other management alternatives for preserving the nation’s outstanding resources.  – National Park Service

The only part of these requirements that could be applied to Gateway Arch is “significant cultural resource” because the Old St. Louis Courthouse where the Dredd Scott trial was held is on the property, but this doesn’t mean that it is a cultural resource. I hold the highest regards for what took place in that courthouse and the historic change that was enacted within its walls, but it still isn’t above other National Memorials like The Lincoln Memorial, the site of the Gettysburg Address, Pearl Harbor, Independence Hall; the list goes on.

There are other national parks that have a historical significance as a part of their emphasis. Mesa Verde has Native adobe homes carved into the cliffside, Dry Tortugas has an old military base that is surrounded by miles of coral reefs, and even the smallest national park before Gateway Arch – Hot Springs National Park – was an early settlement which means it’s also in an urban setting but it’s still 60 times bigger than gateway arch. Despite their historical and cultural significance, they all still “retain a high degree of integrity as a true, accurate, and relatively unspoiled example[s] of a resource.”

I don’t hate the Gateway arch; I just want to draw awareness to the fact the National Memorial designation was the perfect way to describe this testament to the spirit of America. The National Park Service describes a national park as large spaces of land that are “an outstanding example of a particular type of resource” and let’s face it, the Gateway arch just isn’t that. My letter to Congress and designs has all been created with the purpose of urging congress to take the necessary steps to reclassify Gateway Arch as a national memorial in an effort to preserve the importance and gravity that comes with the title of National Park.