

The representation of slavery at historic house museums : 1853-2000

Author: Bethany Jay

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/1365>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),
Boston College University Libraries.

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2009

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

Department of History

THE REPRESENTATION OF SLAVERY AT HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS:
1853-2000

a dissertation

by

BETHANY JAY

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May, 2009

© copyright by BETHANY WAYWELL JAY
2009

The Representation of Slavery at Historic House Museums: 1853-2000
Bethany Jay
Advisor: Dr. James O'Toole

This dissertation examines the development of historic house museums in the United States from the mid-nineteenth century to the present to unravel the complex relationship between public presentations of slavery and popular perceptions of the institution. In conducting the research for this project, I examined the historic and contemporary public programming at nineteen separate museums. This sample of museums includes both publicly funded and private sites in both the North and South. By bringing together a diverse group of museums, this project examines national trends alongside regional traditions as well as the role of organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Park Service, and a host of private institutions in determining different interpretive foci.

This project represents the intersection of two different historiographies. The first of these is the literature on American memory and tradition that examines the different trends in the relationship between Americans and their history. Specifically, this project is concerned with the place of race in American history and memory. This project builds on existing works, such as David Blight's *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, by examining the way in which race and slavery have been historically represented outside of the context of the Civil War.¹ In this way, it is able to draw conclusions about the role of slavery within a larger narrative of American history.

¹ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

In addition to the historiography of race and American memory, this project also intersects with the historiography of museums by examining how different institutions have responded to the increased incorporation of slavery into the American narrative. As educational sites that rely on public patronage, museums have a more difficult task than the historian who aims to create an objective narrative for a small audience of academics and students or the movie or television producer who abandons a commitment to the facts in favor of an emotional or entertaining story.

For more than a century, the presentation of slavery in museums was shaped by the need to promote a celebratory narrative of American history and an understanding of the past that unified white Americans. Any mentions of slavery reflected the perspective of scholars such as U.B. Phillips and William Dunning who argued that inherently inferior slaves benefited from the benevolent institution. In the last several decades, as a consequence of the civil rights movement and the rise of the new social history, museums have begun to address slavery more openly and more critically.

Each museum faced different challenges as it tried to incorporate slavery into their interpretations. These challenges offer insight into the place of slavery within concepts of regional and national identity. Many southern museums, for example, have had to strike a balance between the difficult subject of slavery and idyllic narratives of the Old South, a compromise which is often counterproductive. Northern museums have had to re-imagine significant portions of both their site history and regional history, abandoning the once-dominant narrative of an abolitionist North in favor of one that recognizes the varied and multiple ways in which northerners benefited from slavery.

Organizations with a national focus, such as the National Park Service and National Trust for Historic Preservation, have tried to use their museums to unify American history by merging the experiences of many diverse groups into one narrative. Last, the homes of the founding fathers have had a particularly difficult time reconciling their subject's slaveholding with a celebratory narrative of the nation's founding. Despite these individual challenges, the net result of this process has been similar, creating interpretations that focus on traditional American history and give short shrift to the enslaved population. In many ways therefore, Americans are still wrestling with the place of slavery within a fundamentally celebratory conception of American history.

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Preserving Sacred American Places: Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Arlington House.....	11
Chapter 2: “My Gawd they’ve sold the town:” Expanding Historic Representation at Colonial Williamsburg and Philipsburg Manor.....	63
Chapter 3: Representing the Nation at the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.....	108
Chapter 4: Founding Fathers and “Living Slavery:” New Directions in Interpretation.....	200
Chapter 5: Slavery at “Tara:” Plantation Museums and Selling the South	257
Epilogue.....	304

INTRODUCTION

No institution has had a greater impact on the development of American society than slavery. From its American beginnings in seventeenth-century Virginia until its demise amidst the chaos of the Civil War, slavery rested on a web of social relations, public discourse and government policy that systematically subjugated African Americans. The result of this web is the racial division that is still evident today. Even a cursory glance at recent political debates, ranging from the demand for reparations to African Americans as compensation for their ancestors' unpaid slave labor to the controversy over the continued display of the Confederate flag in Southern states, serves as proof that slavery still plays a role in contemporary American society. Slavery's place in American culture and memory has been far from static, however. In fact, since the Civil War, there have been great changes in the perception of the institution of slavery in particular and African Americans in general.

This dissertation examines historic house museums to unravel the complex relationship between public presentations of slavery and popular perceptions of the institution. Museums play a large role in forming Americans' understandings of their collective past because the millions of visitors who take part in museum tours each year are particularly invested in the history that they hear and see at these sites. Historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan reported in their study *Presence of the Past* that eighty percent of the respondents to a survey believed the history that they were told in museums. On the other hand, only slightly more than half of the respondents believed

their college professors and just over a third of the respondents believed their high school teachers.¹

The sheer number of museum tourists and the relative resonance of the history that they are told in museums make these sites ideal ways to gauge the ways in which Americans have understood their racial past. In conducting the research for this project, I examined the public programming at nineteen separate historic house museums that have or currently are interpreting slavery.² This sample of museums includes both publicly funded and private sites in seven different states in both the North and South.³ By bringing together a diverse group of museums, this project examines national trends alongside regional traditions as well as the role of organizations such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Park Service, and a host of other private institutions in determining different interpretive foci. Museums are not exempt from Michael Kammen's assertion, "We arouse and arrange our memories to suit our psychic needs."⁴ In a continuing dialogue with notions of regional and national identity, museum interpretations have been variously patriotic, selective, nostalgic, and materialistic.

¹ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 21.

² I have purposely only examined the programming that is part of the average public visitor experience at museums. Many of the sites included in this project offer separate slavery-themed education programs for school kids. I chose not to include those programs because they are not available for the general public and are catered to a specific educational agenda and not the average visitor.

³ The principal sites included in this project and their locations are as follows: Bush-Holley House (CT), Philipsburg Manor Upper Mills (NY), Jay Homestead (NY), Decatur House (Washington, D.C.), Arlington House (VA), Mount Vernon (VA), Monticello (VA), Colonial Williamsburg (VA), Stratford Plantation (VA) Edmonston-Alston House (SC), Middleton Place (SC), Boone Hall Plantation (SC), Drayton Hall (SC), Shadows-on-the-Teche (LA), Oak Alley (LA), Evergreen Plantation (LA), Destrehan Plantation (LA), Laura Plantation (LA), Kingsley Plantation (FL). Investigations from all of these sites informed the conclusions in this dissertation although specific examples from each of these museums are not included.

⁴ Michael Kammen. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books), 9.

This project represents the intersection of two different historiographies. The first of these is an emerging literature on American memory and tradition that examines the different trends in the relationship between Americans and their history.⁵ Specifically, this project is concerned with the place of race in American history and memory. David Blight's *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* examines politics, the reminiscence industry, and soldiers' reunions to learn how the national community reconciled competing visions of the Civil War. In many ways, Blight's book set the terms of the discussion of the memory of slavery and the Civil War. This project builds on Blight's work by examining the way race and slavery have been represented outside of the context of the Civil War in order to draw conclusions about the role of slavery within a larger narrative of American history. In addition, while Blight's narrative concludes with the passing of the Civil War generation, this study extends through the twentieth century.⁶ In addition to Blight's work, historians James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton recently assembled an impressive list of scholars to examine individual case studies for their book *Slavery and Public History*. In general, the Hortons' project examines contemporary issues of representing slavery in a variety of different public venues and does not provide an historical perspective on the changing representation of slavery.⁷

⁵ For example, Michael Kammen. *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books). The following texts are also useful: Jo Blatti, ed. *Past Meets Present* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987); David Glassberg. *Sense of History: The Place of the Past in American Life* (Amherst: Umass Press, 2001); David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Mike Wallace. *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996).

⁶ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁷ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton eds., *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (New York: The New Press, 2006). There are also many interesting studies of the memory of race that examine depictions of African Americans in monuments and other works of public

Nevertheless, the essays in *Slavery and Public History* informed my thinking on the topic and I have referenced them throughout this dissertation.

In addition to the historiography of race and American memory, this project also intersects with the historiography of museums by examining how different institutions have responded to the increased incorporation of slavery into the American narrative.⁸ In particular, Jennifer Eichstedt's and Stephen Small's *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* has offered useful categories of representation that have informed this study.⁹ Eichstedt's and Small's concentration on contemporary interpretations, however, did not allow them to examine change over time in museum interpretation. In addition, as sociologists, Eichstedt and Small are primarily interested in the way that these representations affect modern race relations, while I have put museum interpretations in their social and historical context to understand the changing place of slavery in regional and national memory. Additionally, I have tried to be sensitive to the tremendous task that confronts museums that talk about slavery. As Ira Berlin has noted, "Wherever the issue of slavery has appeared – whether in books, museums, or monuments, or classroom discussions – there have been tense debates over

commemoration. The most notable of these are: Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2003); Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson eds., *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Stephanie Yuhl's discussion of the creation of Historic Charleston in the 1920s and 1930s was useful to study the twentieth century creation of a glorious antebellum history in the South. See Stephanie Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2005).

⁸ See for example: Jo Blatti, Ed., *Past Meets Present* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987); Susan A. Crane, *Museums and Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Barbara J. Howe, and Emory L. Kemp, eds. *Public History: An Introduction*. (Malabar, Florida: Krieger, 1986.)

⁹ Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2001).

how to present the topic, often accompanied by charges that the interpreters have said too much (why do you dwell on it?) or too little (why can't you face the truth?).”¹⁰ As educational sites that rely on public patronage, museums have a more difficult task than the historian who aims to create an objective narrative for a (regrettably) small audience of academics and students or the movie or television producer who abandons a commitment to the facts in favor of an emotional and entertaining story.

This dissertation begins by examining some of the earliest examples of historic preservation at Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Arlington House, which were founded between 1853 and 1924. Seeking to enshrine the domestic spaces inhabited by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Robert E. Lee, respectively, the founders of these museums were part of a larger preservation movement that was as concerned with the contemporary United States as it was with the past. In the face of dramatic changes brought about by new waves of immigrants, World War I, and the Russian Revolution, these preservationists looked to the past to give both new and old Americans a “true understanding of American liberty as handed down by our Fathers.”¹¹ In depth discussions of slavery would have been out-of-step with these celebratory interpretations, though that is not to say that slavery was not a part of some of their tours. In fact, several museums relied on the memories of former slaves to guide the reconstruction of

¹⁰ Ira Berlin, “American Slavery in History and Memory and the Search for Social Justice,” *Journal of American History* 90 (2004): 10. Berlin discusses this topic as the difference between “history” as the “all-inclusive inspection of the past” and more emotional “memory” that is “personal...what was done to my people, to my family, to me” and has more resonance for people today, 13.

¹¹ Charles S. Hosmer Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States before Williamsburg* (New York, 1965), 138-139, quoted in Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 8. See also James M. Lindgren, *Preserving Historic New England: Preservation, Progressivism, and the Remaking of Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's Historic House Museums* (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

the house and offer insight into the daily lives of its famous inhabitants. Their presence however, did little to dislodge a depiction of slavery and African Americans at these museums that was grounded in the “Mammy” and “Uncle Tom” stereotypes of the day.

Colonial Williamsburg and New York’s Philipsburg Manor represent the next generation of museums that are discussed in Chapter Two. Both Colonial Williamsburg and Philipsburg were funded by John D. Rockefeller in the 1930s and 1940s. These projects expanded the representation of American history at house museums because they interpreted entire communities and not just the homes of the elite. Despite this change, these museums relied on the same celebratory and indoctrinating history that characterized the interpretations at Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Arlington House. In this way, Colonial Williamsburg did not change the narrative of American history as much as it expanded the narrative to include a greater cross-section of Americans. Slaves and slavery, however, were not included in this expansion. Philipsburg Manor, secure in its northern location, apparently never thought to interpret their site’s slaveholding past while Colonial Williamsburg wrestled more with how to deal with modern African American visitors to its segregated Virginia location than it did with the past presence of slaves. These first two chapters show that in their relationship with the history of slavery, museums were part of the larger Jim Crow culture. Just as segregation laws attempted to define the physical boundaries of black America, thus editing African Americans from the white nation, so too did the nation’s histories limit the impact of the black presence, creating a national identity that was “for whites only.”

The next chapter examines the impact of the civil rights movement and the rise of the new social history through the lens of the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The turbulence of the 1960s, primarily evidenced by anti-war protests, the civil rights movement, and second wave feminism, intersected with trends in academic history, giving rise to new inquiries for historians. These inquiries became known as the new social history and focused on ordinary Americans as the subjects of history. Thus, women, minorities, the poor, and the illiterate could and would be studied as historical actors whose lives affected and reflected broad historical trends.¹²

The new social history had a profound effect on studies of slavery. Whereas previous discussions of slavery by historians such as U.B. Philips represented slaves as the childlike pawns of an essentially benign institution, Kenneth Stamppp's 1956 publication *The Peculiar Institution* explicitly rejected this thesis by emphasizing the brutality of slavery and the agency of individual slaves. Social historical inquiries into slavery were further galvanized by the work of Stanley Elkins and Daniel Moynihan. Elkins' 1959 study entitled *Slavery* argued that slaves were, in fact, childlike and that this condition was the result of the "absolute power" of the slaveholders which created "absolute dependency" for slaves.¹³ Elkins' work was in turn used by Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan in a 1965 study entitled, "The Negro

¹² See Chapter 14 of Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) for a discussion of the development of Black History as a distinct historical field. Novick tracks both the changing scholarship associated with slavery and African American history and the effect (sometimes divisive) of an increasingly diverse community of scholars who studied African American history. See also James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams eds., *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1983). This collection of essays examines trends in social history and their potential impact on sites of public history.

¹³ Stanley Elkins, *Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 130, quoted in Novick, 481.

Family: The Case for National Action.” Moynihan blamed slavery for destroying the fabric of African American families and creating problems in urban black neighborhoods. Moynihan’s report was meant to support the creation of jobs and training that would allow a supposedly psychologically damaged black population to take advantage of the possibilities that equal rights offered. Instead, the Moynihan report, together with Elkins’ *Slavery*, motivated a number of historians to complete studies that refuted their claims. Works such as John Blassingame’s *The Slave Community* and Herbert Gutman’s *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* were part of this confrontational historiography that stressed slave agency and resistance. This trend was itself reshaped in the 1980s and 1990s as historians followed the example set by Eugene Genovese’s *Roll, Jordan, Roll* and became more comfortable revealing the dehumanizing and brutal aspects of enslavement.¹⁴

The inclusive imperative of the new social history and equal rights movements were keenly felt by the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, organizations that were explicitly tasked with representing the entire nation’s history within their sites. This dilemma is the subject of Chapter Three. Beginning in the early 1970s, the National Park Service began searching for ways to offer

¹⁴ U.B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1918); John Blassingame, *The Slave Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Vintage, 1974); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976). See Herbert Gutman, “The Moynihan Report: black History Seduced and Abandoned,” *Nation* 229 (1979): 232-236 and Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967) for a discussion of “The Moynihan Report”. This discussion is included in Novick, 480-489. For additional discussions of the historiography of slavery, see Robert L. Harris, “Coming of Age: The Transformation of Afro-American Historiography,” *The Journal of Negro History* 67 (Summer, 1982): 107-121. See also Al-Tony Gilmore ed., *Revisiting Blassingame’s The Slave Community: The Scholars Respond* (Westport: Greenwood, 1978), and Walter Johnson, “On Agency” *The Journal of Social History* (Fall, 2003): 114-124.

a more complete narrative of American history within their system. This included incorporating new landmarks associated with African American history into the National Park Service system and expanding the interpretation of African American history at the existing sites. The complications and sensitive nature of addressing slavery at national sites of American history is evidenced in the numerous reports that the National Park Service completed to address the topic between the 1970s and the 1990s. These reports failed to produce any significant interpretative changes until the late 1990s. It was also at this time that the National Trust for Historic Preservation was pushed into increasing the slavery interpretations at their sites. This chapter will analyze the new interpretations of slavery at National Park Service and National Trust sites in order to understand the ways in which they address slavery without fundamentally changing the traditional narrative of American history.

The last two chapters of this project look at the contemporary interpretations of slavery. Chapter Five analyzes the recent interpretive decisions at Colonial Williamsburg, Philipsburg Manor, Mount Vernon, and Monticello. Colonial Williamsburg has emerged, with good reason, as the leader in slavery interpretation but this has not been accomplished without controversy and compromise at the museum. While Colonial Williamsburg comes the closest to truly integrating slavery into the narrative (and experience) of American history, Philipsburg Manor largely abandoned the larger discussion of American history to refocus its entire interpretation on New York slavery. As the homes of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, Mount Vernon and Monticello did not have the option of refocusing their entire interpretation but instead had

to find a way to integrate the history of slavery into their celebratory narratives of the men behind the nation's founding. This has been an uncomfortable fit and the methodology that the sites use to discuss slavery indicates that the American people are still unable to confront the history of the founders as slaveholders.

The final chapter examines the particular opportunities and challenges that are associated with slavery interpretation in the Deep South. These museums are both the products and the producers of a romantic image of the antebellum South that stresses the gentility and glory of the slaveholding era. This image of the Old South has become a vital part of southern regional and in fact, national, identity. In some cases, this identity has meant that the history of slavery has been entirely sacrificed in favor of the romantic Old South. In other cases, even earnest museums have found themselves limited both by their dependence on tourists who are looking for their own *Gone With the Wind* experience and by the inherent difficulties involved with incorporating slavery into any museum narrative. This chapter will examine how the interpretations at southern museums discuss slavery without debunking the myth of the Old South.

This project ends with a postscript on the 2008 Presidential election and its meaning for the memory of slavery in the United States. More than any recent event, the campaign and election brought issues of race into the forefront of American culture. Like the museum industry, the 2008 election highlights the way in which Americans are still grappling with the place of slavery within a fundamentally celebratory narrative of American history.

CHAPTER 1

Preserving Sacred American Places: Monticello, Mount Vernon, and Arlington House

In 1929, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (MVLA) placed a small stone marker approximately fifty feet from the site of George Washington's tomb on the grounds of Mount Vernon. The marker reads, "In Memory of the many faithful colored servants of the Washington family buried at Mount Vernon from 1760-1860. Their unidentified graves surround this spot."¹ This act of seeming commemoration strikes today's visitor as unusual in an era when Jim Crow laws governing racial interaction and relegating African American citizens to second-class status were the norm. Why did the MVLA choose to mark this burial ground? Was their decision motivated by a desire to commemorate the Mount Vernon slaves' work in creating the plantation? Was it an acknowledgement of slavery's wrongs and an attempt to bring those who were enslaved into the same American narrative that celebrated the achievements of George Washington? Was the MVLA's decision to mark the slave burial ground emblematic of a larger movement among historians and house museums?

The complexities of this gesture can only be understood when placed into the context of contemporary academic and preservation work, its political and cultural context, and the history of the organization's own founding and initial interpretation. As a whole, the preservation movement at historic houses before 1945 was in conversation with all of these forces. Whether the public and the museum administrators realized it or

¹ "Report of the Tomb Committee," Minutes of the MVLA Vol. VII, 1925-2, Minutes of the Council, 1928, Mount Vernon Ladies' Association Archives, Mount Vernon, VA.

not, the history that they saw and told at historic house museums was a result of much larger cultural movements both within and outside of the academy. This chapter will examine the founding and early interpretations of Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Arlington House. By placing each museum's genesis within its political, cultural, and academic context, this chapter will argue that these early museums subordinated the history of slavery and African Americans in favor of a narrative of American history that unified the white population in the wake of the Civil War and inculcated patriotic values in the diverse museum audience.

Organizing to Preserve Sacred History

While Americans had organized to prevent or, as was more often the case, bemoan the destruction of individual sites of public interest since the eighteenth century, historic preservation emerged as a large-scale organized movement in the mid-nineteenth century.² The first organized efforts however, were both sporadic and inauspicious. For example, the attempt to save a house in Deerfield, Massachusetts that bore marks from the 1704 massacre in that town and those to prevent the destruction of the prominent Hancock House on Boston Common failed.

The 1850 creation of a museum at Hasbrouck House in Newburgh, New York, which served as Washington's headquarters during the Revolution, is the first recognized success of the preservation movement. While this successful effort was a result of luck more than any particular organizational skill, Hasbrouck House preservationists

² Charles Hosmer cites the first recorded example of "preservation sentiment" as Benjamin Latrobe's regret that an old house in James City County, Virginia was going to be destroyed in 1796. Early preservation movements also saved Independence Hall in Philadelphia and Fort Ticonderoga. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 29-33.

exemplified attitudes and methodology that would guide the preservation movement into the twentieth century.³ The site was associated with George Washington and is emblematic of the early preservationists' penchant for those buildings "in which great men had lived or great events had taken place...Buildings were esteemed for their associative value, rather than for themselves or their relation to their surroundings."⁴ By targeting sites associated with "great men," preservationists were able to draw upon Americans' shared civil religion as justification for preservation. Civil religion, a phrase coined by Rousseau in *The Social Contract*, was defined by Robert Bellah as "a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred thing and institutionalized in a collectivity." Before the Civil War, Bellah argues, "The American civil religion focused above all on the event of the Revolution, which was seen as the final act of the Exodus from the old lands across the waters. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were the sacred scriptures and Washington the divinely appointed Moses who led his people out of the hands of tyranny."⁵ Descriptions of Washington from nineteenth-century textbooks support Bellah's argument as "he appeared rather as divinity than as man. As a Christlike liberator the contrast between Washington and European heroes was sharp indeed. That this greatest of all men appeared in the United States is sufficient justification for American civilization."⁶ This

³ The preservation of Hasbrouck House benefited from the fact that the owner defaulted on a government loan secured by the house. Hosmer, 35.

⁴ Walter Muir Whitehill, "Foreword" in Hosmer, 8.

⁵ Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967): 1-21. Online: http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm.

⁶ Ruth Miller Elson, "American Schoolbooks and 'Culture' in the Nineteenth Century," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVI (December, 1959): 418, quoted in Hosmer, 41. Kyle Ward discusses the changing textbook interpretations of George Washington's defeat at Fort Duquesne during the French and

celebration of the founders extended to their slaveholding. A popular 1902 textbook asserted, “Jefferson’s slaves thought no one could be better than their master” and, “He was always kind to them, and they were ready to do anything for him.” The description continued with an uplifting story of Jefferson’s arrival at Mount Vernon following a long trip to France: the “negroes went to meet his carriage...when they caught sight of the carriage, they shouted and sang with delight. They would gladly have taken out the horses and drawn it up the steep hill. When Jefferson reached Monticello and got out, the negroes took him in their arms, and, laughing and crying for joy, they carried him into the house. Perhaps no king ever got such a welcome as that; for that welcome was not bought with money: it came from the heart.”⁷ Whether they were portrayed as the Moses of the American Revolution or the benevolent patriarchs of individual plantations, the founding fathers were celebrated as the saints of Americans’ shared belief system. Because of this fact, the buildings, battlefields, and artifacts associated with them became sacred relics that symbolized the United States. Their preservation was fundamental to the continuation of American culture. Threats to these relics, by extension, became threats to the fabric of American life.

Representatives of the State of New York clearly exemplified these beliefs while working to save Hasbrouck House. Governor Hamilton Fish, in an address to the

Indian War. He argues that the most textbooks (beginning in 1821) refused to move away from a heroic view of Washington even when discussing this early defeat. The mythology of Washington’s greatness only grew throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. See Kyle Ward, *History in the Making: An Absorbing Look at How American History Has Changed in the Telling Over the Last 200 Years* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 73-82.

⁷ Peter H. Wood, “Slave Labor Camps in Early America: Overcoming Denial and Discovering the Gulag” (paper presented at the Atlantic History Seminar at the College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina, 2 October 1998), Folder: Readings – Slavery Interpretation Initiative, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust Offices, Washington, D.C., 3-4, n.7.

legislature, stated that the house was “perhaps the last relic within the boundaries of the State, under the control of the legislature, connected with the history of the illustrious” George Washington. The legislative committee tasked with reporting on the subject expanded on Fish’s sentiments:

If our love of country is excited when we read the biography of our revolutionary heroes, or the history of revolutionary events, how much more will the flame of patriotism burn in our bosoms when we tread the ground where was shed the blood of our fathers, or when we move among the scenes where were conceived and consummated their noble achievements...No traveler who touches upon the shores of Orange county will hesitate to make a pilgrimage to this beautiful spot...and if he have an American heart in his bosom,...his patriotism will kindle with deeper emotion; his aspirations of his country’s good will will ascend from a more devout mind for having visited the “Headquarters of Washington.”⁸

By preserving Hasbrouck House so that Americans could visit it, the legislature ensured the continuation of a patriotic spirit and the American way of life. This assertion is typical of an attitude that would drive the preservation movement into the twentieth century.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the state of Washington’s own house was a concern for many Americans. Mount Vernon had passed through three generations of Washingtons who were increasingly unable to provide the necessary upkeep. At the time of its purchase by the MVL, “The paint was peeling from the walls, the roof was sagging, at least one of the great pillars along the front had collapsed and been replaced by scantlings, the lawn was waist-high in rioting weeds.”⁹ Despite the esteem in which

⁸ Richard Caldwell, *A True History of the Acquisition of Washington’s Headquarters at Newburgh by the State of New York* (Salisbury Mills, New York: Stivers, Slauson and Boyd, 1887), 8-9, 21, 23, in Hosmer, 36.

⁹ Gerald W. Johnson, *Mount Vernon: The Story of a Shrine: The Story of the Rescue and Continuing Restoration of George Washington’s Home* (Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, revised edition 2002), 6.

the American public held George Washington, early preservation efforts were unsuccessful. These efforts began in earnest with an 1846 petition drive asking Congress to buy the house so that it would not be “subject to the uncertainties and transfers of individual fortune.” Congress took no action as a result of this petition. The next governmental effort to save Mount Vernon came when an Army board wrote to owner John Washington in 1851 to inquire about buying the house so that it could be used to house disabled war veterans. Washington named a price of \$200,000 for the estate, a sum that was beyond the reach of the Army board. In the coming years, Washington remained firmly committed to this price and the state of Virginia, private corporations, and the federal government were all dissuaded from purchasing the property.¹⁰

It took the person of Ann Pamela Cunningham to organize the country’s reverence for George Washington into a viable campaign to save his house. Cunningham had a privileged upbringing on a South Carolina plantation called Rosemont. Friends remembered the young Cunningham as “serious, intelligent, and quite bewitching.”¹¹ When she was seventeen, however, Cunningham fell from a horse and suffered spinal injuries that left her in constant pain and incapacitated for most of her adult life. This unlikely savior of Mount Vernon was brought to the task by her mother who, as the story goes, was traveling down the Potomac River on a steam boat and “went on deck as the

¹⁰ *Documents Relating to the Proposed Purchase of Mount Vernon by the Citizens of the United States, in Order that They May at all Times Have a Legal and Indisputable Right to Visit the Grounds, Mansion and Tomb of Washington* (Washington: T. Barnard, 1846), Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association Archives, Mount Vernon, VA; Letter from Lieutenant Colonel H.L. Scott to John Washington, March 18, 1851, Centennial Files, Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association Archives, Mount Vernon, VA; Letter from John A. Washington to Lt. Col. H.L. Scott, March 25, 1851, Centennial Files, Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association Archives, Mount Vernon, VA, quoted in Hosmer, 41-42.

¹¹ Hosmer, 44.

bell tolled and we passed Mount Vernon. I was painfully depressed at the ruin and desolation of the home of Washington, and the thought passed through my mind; Why was it that the women of his country did not try to keep it in repair, if the men could not do it? It does seem such a blot on the country!” In response, Cunningham supposedly cried, “I will do it,” and set to work.¹²

The language of civil religion rang through the movement to save Mount Vernon and began with Cunningham’s opening salvo, an “Appeal to the Ladies of the South,” which was printed in the *Charleston Mercury* in 1853. In this letter, Cunningham referenced the symbolic divinity of figures like Washington saying, “A spontaneous work like this would be such a monument of love and patriotism as has never been reared to patriot *or* mortal man.” In addition Cunningham took for granted that Mount Vernon would be recognized as a sacred site; the house’s preservation, “Would furnish a shrine where at least the mothers of the land and their innocent children might make their offering in the cause of greatness, goodness, and prosperity of their country!”¹³

Cunningham’s efforts to preserve and restore Mount Vernon defined the rest of her life. What began as an anonymous appeal to the “Ladies of the South” evolved into a nationwide organization of women who worked in concert with the state of Virginia, the Washington family, and politicians like Massachusetts’ Edward Everett to raise the necessary funds to purchase and restore Mount Vernon. While this process has been ably described in other monographs, it is important to note that the rescue and preservation of

¹² Hosmer, 45.

¹³ Ann Pamela Cunningham, “To the Ladies of the South” *Mercury*, 2 December 1853, quoted in Gerald W. Johnson, *Mount Vernon: The Story of a Shrine: The Story of the Rescue and Continuing Restoration of George Washington’s Home* (Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2002),16. Emphasis added by the author.

Mount Vernon set the standard by which Americans would judge the nation's shrines for many years.¹⁴ In fact, the example of Mount Vernon loomed over the efforts to preserve Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home, and Stratford Hall and Arlington House, both residences of Robert E. Lee. Like Mount Vernon, each of these homes was associated with a prominent historic figure. Because of their links to Thomas Jefferson and Robert E. Lee, the preservation efforts of each of these homes appropriated the language of civil religion to make a case for the preservation and canonization of their individual museums.

As the home of Thomas Jefferson, Monticello had a legitimate claim to a position within the pantheon of America's sacred places. Thus, when the first concerted efforts to publicly operate the house began in the early twentieth century, the fact that Monticello was privately owned was particularly irksome to many. In addition, compounding the public's general distaste of privately owned shrines was the fact that Monticello had been owned by a Jewish family since 1834, when Uriah Levy gained title to the property. The exact circumstances of Levy's purchase are unknown and have been shrouded in myth and controversy since the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Columnist Amos J. Cummings popularized one story of Monticello's sale that epitomized the public's view of the Levy family. In Cummings's tale, a group of patriotic Americans raised money to purchase

¹⁴ See Gerald W. Johnson, *Mount Vernon: The Story of a Shrine: The Story of the Rescue and Continuing Restoration of George Washington's Home* (Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, revised edition 2002), and Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 29-33. Patricia West, in *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), describes the MVLA's acquiring of Mount Vernon in the context of the sectional crisis and women's work in benevolent organizations.

¹⁵ Hosmer, 153.

Monticello and give it back to Martha Jefferson Randolph, who had been forced to sell the property after her father's death. An unidentified representative of this group arrived a day too late to purchase the home for Jefferson's daughter. Finding that Uriah Levy had purchased the home, the representative tried to buy it from Levy who replied, "'Mein frien' you are a glever feller, but you talk too much. I will take a huntret thousand tollars.'" Cummings editorialized that this story "ought to bring a blush of shame to every American face."¹⁶ Cummings's article likely reflects the author's anti-Semitism more than any factual account of Monticello's purchase. In fact, Uriah Levy, far from being the newly arrived immigrant with a thick German-Yiddish accent that Cummings portrays, had a pedigree that would make many Americans blush. A fifth generation American, Levy was the first Jewish-American to serve an entire career as a commissioned Naval officer. His ancestors helped to found Savannah and George Washington himself was a guest at his grandparent's wedding.¹⁷ Despite these facts, the myth of Levy's purchase would color the family's ownership of Monticello. Ann Cunningham and the MVLA had shown that private ownership of a patriotic shrine by an American, even a descendent of George Washington, was cause for alarm. Jewish Americans were apparently not full practitioners in the shared American civil religion and therefore the ownership of Monticello by a Jewish family was a national disgrace.

¹⁶ Amos J. Cummings, "A National Humiliation: A Story of Monticello," reprinted in *Rare Virginia Pamphlets*, Vol. 70, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections Department, quoted in Marc Leepson, *Saving Monticello* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 33-34.

¹⁷ Marc Leepson, "The Levys at Monticello," reprinted from *Preservation* magazine [on-line]; available from <http://www.monticello.org/about/levy.html>; Internet; accessed 3 February 2008.

During the Levys' ownership of the property, in fact, there were several efforts to establish Monticello as a public space.¹⁸ The movement that eventually succeeded began in 1912 with the work of Maud Littleton. Littleton was a New York socialite and the wife of Congressman Martin Littleton, who served in the House of Representatives with fellow New Yorker Jefferson Levy, Uriah Levy's nephew and Monticello's owner. Maud Littleton had both the desire and the political connections to bring Monticello's preservation to the nation's attention.

Littleton began her campaign to wrest control of Monticello from Levy with a publication entitled "One Wish" that she sent to many prominent Americans. In this publication, Littleton laid out her case for making Monticello a national shrine, "I thought how much more in keeping with his [Jefferson's] sense of freedom, and love of nature, if instead of erecting a statue to him in Washington, the nation, whom he loved so well, were to purchase and preserve forever to his memory the house and grounds and graveyard at Monticello, now owned by Mr. Jefferson Levy of New York."¹⁹

Following a path that had proved successful for Cunningham and the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Littleton hoped to drum up enough support that Levy would consent to sell Monticello to the Jefferson-Monticello Memorial Association. In this way

¹⁸ Monticello almost became public property as a condition of Uriah Levy's will. Uriah Levy, who bought Monticello in 1836, left the home to the "people of the United States." After a protracted Congressional debate over how to use the house and protests from the Levy family that the will was invalid, Monticello was sold to Jefferson Levy in 1878. In 1897, Williams Jennings Bryan attempted to broker a sale of the house from Jefferson Levy to the government but was not successful. See Hosmer, chapter 8 for more information.

¹⁹ Maud Littleton, "One Wish" (privately printed: 1911), quoted in Melvin J. Urofsky, *The Levy Family and Monticello 1834-1923* (Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2001), 165.

Monticello would be open for all Americans to “lay upon his grave a nation’s tears.”²⁰ When Levy proved unwilling to sell, Littleton had to change strategies. In a move that set off years of public debate, Littleton advocated for a Congressional resolution whereby a committee of five Senators and five Representatives would “inquire into the wisdom and ascertain the cost of acquiring” Monticello. This committee would investigate whether the government could buy Monticello from Levy or, if Levy remained uncooperative, seize it by right of eminent domain. To justify this unprecedented position, Littleton testified in front of the House Committee on Rules saying of Levy,

And by what right must the people ask Mr. Levy’s permission to visit the home and grave of Thomas Jefferson?...Is he insensible to all emotions of patriotism and unselfishness? Does he want a whole Nation crawling at his feet forever for permission to worship at this shrine of our independence?²¹

The irony of the federal government taking the unprecedented step of seizing private property for a tourist attraction in Thomas Jefferson’s name was not lost on many and became a dominant theme in the debates that surrounded the resolution. In addition, many Congressmen worried about the expense of managing Monticello and the precedent that their action would set. In the end, the resolution was defeated in the Senate.²²

The Resolution’s defeat did not stop Littleton or public opinion from continuing to advocate for the public’s right to Monticello. In an article entitled, “Monticello – Shrine or Bachelor Hall?” southern columnist Dorothy Dix advocated for preservation so that Americans could make “a pious pilgrimage to the holy places where lived and died

²⁰ Ibid,165.

²¹ Senate Concurrent Resolution 92, in, U.S. Congresss, 62nd Cong., 2nd Sess., Senate Committee on the Library, *Public Ownership of Monticello, hearings...*, 9 July 1912 (Washington, 1912), 3, quoted in Urofsky, 167; U.S. Congress,, 62nd Cong., 2nd Sess., *Public Ownership of Monticello. Hearings before the House Committee on Rules...*24 July 1912 (Washington, 1912), 30, quoted in Urofsky,, 170.

²² Urofsky, 175.

those who made America great.”²³ A 1914 article in *The Independent* entitled “National Shrine to Thomas Jefferson” painted the private ownership of Monticello in dire terms:

An obelisk of granite surmounts the grave and a little lot 100 feet square surrounds it. At the home where Thomas Jefferson lived and died, this is the only memorial of him which belongs to the people. The house which he built almost with his own hands – so closely were his designs followed – and which he treasured above every earthly possession fell at his death into alien hands, in which it still remains. The estate of Monticello is owned by someone who has no relationship with the Jefferson family, and when we visit the grave of Thomas Jefferson, we are intruders on private property; we enter the gates of Monticello only by the indulgence of its owner.²⁴

Despite the maudlin tone and factual errors – Jefferson’s burial site was still owned by Jefferson descendants and Levy routinely brought visitors through the house – this article clearly portrays the sentiment of the public that Monticello, by its association with Thomas Jefferson, belonged to the nation at large.

Littleton’s cause was also bolstered by many Americans’ alarm at the large numbers of immigrants, one million of them Jewish, who arrived in the United States in the early twentieth century. Nativist anxiety about the level of foreign influence in the United States was apparent in the propaganda that surrounded Littleton’s campaign. As Patricia West has noted in *Domesticating History*, Dix played up Jefferson Levy’s Jewish faith in an article that advocated the public takeover of Monticello. Citing the lack of sacred sites where Americans could pilgrimage to reconnect to American greatness, Dix found it unjust that “an alien sits at the fireside where they [great Americans] planned

²³ Dorothea Dix, “Monticello – Shrine or Bachelor’s Hall?” *Good Housekeeping*, April 1914, 538-539, quoted in Urofsky, 180.

²⁴ “A National Monument to Thomas Jefferson,” *The Independent* 12 January 1914; p. 60; APS online.

their immortal deeds.”²⁵ Dix’s use of the term “alien” to describe Jefferson Levy, despite his family’s generations of residence in America, is a telling indicator of the level of anxiety about foreign influence in the United States. Maud Littleton, while never overtly anti-Semitic, engaged in similar tactics in her efforts to wrest Monticello from Levy. She referred to Levy as an “Oriental potentate” whose unwillingness to sell Monticello was evidence of his lack of loyalty to the nation.²⁶

Eventually, the pressure to sell and significant financial troubles toppled Levy’s resolve. When politician William Jennings Bryan renewed an earlier plea for Levy to sell the property to the government, he declared, “I bow to your wishes and those of the American people” and settled on a price of \$500,000 – a figure that did not include the cost of the substantial amount of preservation that he had completed on the home.²⁷ Unfortunately, with World War I looming, Congress was not able to muster the initiative to purchase the house. In 1919, with upkeep on the house proving difficult for Levy, it was offered for public sale. A group of New York attorneys, led by native Virginians Stuart Gibboney and Henry Alan Johnston formed themselves into the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation (TJMF). This group of prominent men followed the example of Ann Cunningham and set to the task of raising the purchase price of \$500,000. Despite Jefferson’s popularity, this was a difficult task. By 1923, the TJMF finally purchased Monticello for \$500,000 and began operating the house as a museum. The TJMF still owns and operates Monticello.

²⁵See West, 93-108; Dorothy Dix, “Monticello – Shrine or Bachelor’s Hall?” *Good Housekeeping*, April 1914, 538-539, quoted in West, 104.

²⁶ Urofsky, 181.

²⁷ *New York American* 6 October 1914, quoted in Urofsky, 182.

The overwhelming public support that Americans gave to shrines to honor George Washington and Thomas Jefferson encouraged preservation movements across the country to try to muster support for shrines to honor everyone from Abraham Lincoln to George Walter, a signer of the Declaration of Independence whose home was heralded as “the Mount Vernon of Georgia.”²⁸ One of the few historic figures whose commemoration generated as much emotional support as Washington’s and Jefferson’s was Robert E. Lee. In fact, the public was so enamored with the image of Robert E. Lee that two separate sites, Arlington House and Stratford Plantation were saved in the 1920s to honor his memory.

Unlike Mount Vernon and Monticello, Arlington House was already owned by the federal government when the public began clamoring for a shrine to Lee. The United States government confiscated the house during the Civil War when the Lee family violated a wartime law that required taxes on property in occupied areas to be paid in person. From that point on, the house and its grounds were taken for “government use, for war, military and charitable purposes.”²⁹ Through the efforts of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and Brigadier General Montgomery C. Meigs, a national cemetery was located on the property in 1864. Stanton’s and Meigs’s actions were motivated by the punitive objective to make sure that the Lee family never regained control of Arlington

²⁸ *American Monthly Magazine*, July 1899, 43, quoted in Hosmer, 61.

²⁹ Official website of Arlington National Cemetery, Historical Information, http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org/historical_information/arlington_house.html (accessed 8 February 2008).

House.³⁰ They were successful and until restoration efforts began in 1924, much of the house was used as administrative offices. Some rooms were open to the public who, as early as 1870, were coming to “visit the home of Rebel Lee.”³¹ These visitors, however, were confronted with “bare rooms [that] can now give but little idea of the life and cheerfulness that once reigned here.”³² Instead of the furnishings and art that had once adorned the walls, the rooms were decorated only with a visitor register, cemetery maps, and copies of famous speeches.

For many years southern groups such as the United Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy called for Congress to restore Arlington House as a memorial for Lee. The United Confederate Veterans was founded in 1889 to bring together local Confederate veterans groups into one entity that would provide support and spearhead remembrance activities. By 1904, the United Confederate Veterans had 1,565 local chapters and approximately 85,000 members. The United Daughters of the Confederacy, founded in 1894, also engaged in a wide variety of fundraising and commemorative efforts. By 1900, the United Daughters of the Confederacy had 17,000 members spread across twenty states and territories. By World War I, this number may have grown to 100,000 members.³³

³⁰ Official website of Arlington National Cemetery, Historical Information, http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org/historical_information/arlington_house.html (accessed 8 February 2008); Hosmer, 64.

³¹ Karen Byrne Kinzey, “Battling for Arlington House: To Lee or Not To Lee,” *The Arlington Historical Magazine* 12, 3 (October, 2003): 22.

³² Karl Decker and Angus McSween, *Historic Arlington* (Washington, DC: The Decker and McSween Publishing Co., 1892), 37, quoted in Kinzey, 23.

³³ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 272-273.

The efforts of these commemorative organizations to “create a shrine where all who honor the name of General Lee and who cherish the memory of that great American may gather during all the years to come” were bolstered by the work of Frances Parkinson Keyes. Keyes was a popular author and columnist. Like Maud Littleton, Keyes also enjoyed significant political influence through her husband, Senator Henry Keyes of New Hampshire. As she told the story, Keyes’s interest in Arlington House began when she visited it as a child and vowed that “when the time comes that I have some influence, I’m going to make people see what a disgrace it is that General Lee’s home should be left in such a condition. I’m going to do something about it.”³⁴ As an adult, Keyes joined the legion of women advocating for the preservation of historic homes and began writing about the Lee Mansion in her popular *Good Housekeeping* column. Making the inevitable comparison between the Lee Mansion and Mount Vernon, Keyes stated, “The Lee Mansion is an even more stately one than Mount Vernon and might well harbor as many valuable and beautiful historic objects.”³⁵ Using her public forum in *Good Housekeeping* and her influence with Congress, Parkinson was able to align several powerful congressmen behind her efforts to restore the Lee Mansion. In 1925, a resolution “authorizing the restoration of the Lee Mansion in the Arlington National Cemetery” passed both houses and was approved by President Coolidge.³⁶

Keyes’s efforts to preserve of the home of “Rebel Lee” alongside the homes of patriots Washington and Jefferson was bolstered by the nation’s desire to cement the

³⁴ *Confederate Veteran*, Vol. XXXIII, 246, quoted in Kinzey, 23; Frances Parkinson Keyes, *All Flags Flying: Reminiscences of Frances Parkinson Keyes* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 181, quoted in Kinzey, 23.

³⁵ *Washington Post*, 7 August 1921, quoted in Kinzey, 24.

³⁶ *Public Resolution, No. 74 68th Congress* (H.J. Res. 264), quoted in Kinzey, 24.

reunion of North and South following the Civil War. Of course the use of Arlington House as a symbol of national reconciliation was part of a long process of reunion in which the person of Robert E. Lee figured prominently. The imagery that was employed to celebrate Robert E. Lee and his home had roots in the Lost Cause ideology that emerged in southern writing and popular culture as early as 1870. This ideology stressed the glory and dignity of the Confederate cause and vehemently maintained that the war was lost not because of any deficiency in valor but because of the industrial might of the northern aggressor. Lee became the symbol of the Lost Cause – dignified and gracious in defeat - and the character of the Confederacy as a whole was only made more glorious by its association with Lee.³⁷

The early commemoration efforts associated with the Lost Cause veneration of Lee were not the symbols of national reconciliation that Arlington House was but instead were used to explicate and solidify a southern version of Civil War history grounded in the defense of southern military valor and the rejection of slavery as a cause of the war. The movement to create a monument to Lee exemplifies some of these uses of the Lee image. Immediately following Lee's death in October of 1870, several competing organizations formed to memorialize him with works of public art. A group of former Confederates and friends of Lee organized to oversee a monument over his grave on the grounds of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. The university had

³⁷ This argument is more fully explained in David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2001), 260-261. See also Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980). Wilson argues that the Lost Cause represented the South's ultimate success in forging a separate and unified culture (if not a separate nation) after the Civil War. Religious imagery was an important part of this cultural creation.

already changed its name from Washington College to honor Lee following his death in 1870. This group had the blessing of Mary, Lee's widow. At the same time, however, several groups in Richmond began organizing to plan a memorial and move Lee's remains to the former Confederate capitol. One of these groups was organized by former Confederate General Jubal Early. Unnerved by the choice of Lexington for Lee's burial and monument, Early wanted to move Lee's remains to Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery where, "when the first flush of the resurrection morn tinges the skies, may [the Confederate dead's] unsealed eyes behold the grand figure" of Lee.³⁸ The efforts of the various Richmond organizations were so dogmatic that, citing "pain and annoyance" at the constant requests, Mary Lee asked to not be further contacted about moving her husband's remains.³⁹

For Early and many of his cohorts, the memorial campaign held tremendous importance because the person of Robert E. Lee was inextricably entwined with a specific image of Confederate history that liberated him and other soldiers from any humiliation in defeat. In 1872, two years after Lee's death, Early maintained that the general had not been "conquered in battle, but surrendered because he had no longer an army with which to give battle." Vindicating the army from any charges of being unfit for the task, Early argued that the soldiers "had been gradually worn down by the

³⁸ *Organization of the Lee Monument Association and the Association of Northern Virginia* (n.p., n.d) copy in Lee Papers, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia, quoted in Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 43. See also "Ghost Dance: The Failed Revitalization Movement of the Virginians" for an account of the Lee monument controversy in Gaines M. Foster *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, The Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

³⁹ Ollinger Crenshaw, *General Lee's College: The Rise and Growth of Washington and Lee University* (New York; 1969), 191-192, quoted in Connelly, 45.

combined agencies of numbers, steam-power, railroads, mechanism, and all the resources of physical science.”⁴⁰ Indeed, the idea that the Confederacy merely succumbed to overwhelming numbers gained credence in coming years.

By the 1920s, the use of the Lee image as a strategy to defend the military valor of the Confederacy had taken on a more conciliatory tone. Whereas Lee’s work after the war to reconcile the country and his reluctance to engage in the Lost Cause rhetoric and Confederate memorials proved problematic to some of his less reconstructed colleagues, these same actions made him the perfect symbol of national reunion in the 1920s.⁴¹ In the resolution authorizing the restoration of Arlington House, Michigan Representative Louis Cramton asserted that the mansion should be restored because Lee was the appropriate symbol of the nation’s reconciliation. Cramton cited the struggle of the Civil War and the “bitterness of other days” but found that the United States had gone through an unprecedented sea change that “in the lifetime of men then living...the country [is] so absolutely reunited as is our country at this moment.” In Cramton’s view, Lee was responsible for this reconciliation because “there was no man in the South who did more by his precept and example to bring about that condition than did Robert E. Lee.”⁴² The fact that Cramton was the son of a Union soldier made his introduction of the resolution even more poignant and the Representative would not let this fact be lost on his audience. Instead, Cramton made the case that his gesture of reconciliation was felt by all

⁴⁰ J. William Jones, *Personal Reminiscences, Anecdotes, and Letters of Gen. Robert E. Lee* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1875), 43, 49, quoted in Foster, 59.

⁴¹ See Foster, chapters 2 and 3 for a complete discussion of Lee’s postwar activities and their relation to Civil War commemoration and the Lost Cause ideology.

⁴² “Moves to Restore Robert E. Lee Home,” *New York Times*, 22 January 1925, 19, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2001).

northerners: “I felt that there was a propriety in the son of a Union soldier offering this tribute to the military leader of the Confederacy and to Robert E. Lee as an individual, but I am satisfied, growing out of discussions I have had with many in the past that I fully and fairly represent the sentiment of the North in offering this tribute.”⁴³

Cramton’s sense of northern sentiment was prescient and there is no evidence of public outcry about the use of federal funds to restore the home of the Confederate general. Instead, three years after Cramton’s resolution passed, the *New York Times* was proclaiming that “no one will grudge the money which the War Department proposes to spend for the repair and renovation of the Lee Mansion at Arlington House.” The same article proceeded to detail Lee’s long list of achievements and honorable qualities and asserted, “No intelligent Northerner attempts any longer to deny that Lee was among great Americans.” General Lee even received the honor of being favorably compared to George Washington who, “Had he met with Lee’s failure... would have shown in defeat the same magnanimity and hopeful tolerance that distinguished the Southern leader.”⁴⁴

Across the Potomac River, efforts to restore Stratford Hall, the home of Founding Fathers Richard Henry Lee and Francis Lightfoot Lee focused on Stratford’s history as Robert E. Lee’s boyhood home. In truth, Lee only lived at Stratford Hall until he was four. Predictably, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, with Mrs. Charles D. Lanier of Greenwich, Connecticut, spearheading the movement, sought to purchase the home because of its association with Lee. The women intended to “have it for permanent

⁴³ Ibid, 19.

⁴⁴ “The Arlington House,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1925, 18, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2001).

national headquarters and care for it precisely as Mount Vernon is cared for, and [give it to] our country for all time.”⁴⁵ Newspaper articles that related the relatively easy process by which Mrs. Charles D. Lanier and the United Daughters of the Confederacy purchased Stratford Hall in 1929 proclaimed, “Lee’s Birthplace Purchased as Shrine of Confederacy,” and “Birthplace of Gen. Lee Proposed for a Shrine”⁴⁶ One article stated that the home “will be preserved as a national shrine, similar to Mount Vernon and Monticello.”⁴⁷ The three organizations were, in fact, similar. The women cemented the home’s primary association with Robert E. Lee when, following the model of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, Lanier organized the Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation to direct the restoration and administration of Stratford Hall.⁴⁸

While today Stratford Hall does not have the same name recognition as Arlington House, its preservation enjoyed national attention. Robert E. Lee Memorial Foundation literature and publicity repeatedly mentioned the inter-sectional support that the restoration enjoyed. For example, in an article detailing the Foundation’s many events to raise money to pay off the mortgage, the author noted that the Robert E. Lee Foundation purchased the home in 1929 with “contributions from individuals and historic and patriotic bodies” from states as diverse as Connecticut, New York, Arkansas, Georgia,

⁴⁵ Letter from Ethel Armes to Mrs. Charles D. Lanier, Stratford Hall website, <http://www.stratfordhall.org/maydoc/trans.html> (accessed February 2008).

⁴⁶ “Lee’s Birthplace Purchased as Shrine of Confederacy: Connecticut U.D.C. Chapter Acquires Homestead on Potomac,” *The Washington Post*, 20 January 1929, M1-2; Ethel Armes, ‘Birthplace of Gen. Lee Proposed for a Shrine’ *The New York Times* 23 September 1928, XX8.

⁴⁷ “Lee’s Birthplace Purchased as Shrine of Confederacy: Connecticut U.D.C. Chapter Acquires Homestead on Potomac,” *The Washington Post*, 20 January 1929, M1-2.

⁴⁸ See West, *Domesticating History*, for an overview of women’s work in the early preservation movement. West argues that women were vital to the early movement but became excluded from preservation as it became professionalized and thus, dominated by men.

Alabama, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Delaware, Wyoming and Colorado.⁴⁹ The theme of national reconciliation was especially timely because of the country's recent involvement in World War I. In fact, in arguing for the preservation of Arlington House, Representative Cramton gave Lee's "manly attributes of precept and example" partial credit for "cementing the American people in bonds of patriotic devotion and action against common external enemies in the war with Spain and in the World War."⁵⁰

Creating a Narrative of America at the Homes of Washington, Jefferson, and Lee

After establishing these homes as sites of public history, each museum turned to the task of creating an interpretation, thereby deciding the message that it would convey to the public. As shrines to Washington, Jefferson, and Lee, these museums were created to honor memories and celebrate achievements and the interpretations reflected this desire. The narrative at each site was decidedly celebratory and was informed by a vigilant dedication to the authenticity of the structure and its furnishings. While these interpretive decisions may seem inconsequential, their importance should not be underestimated. From the time they opened – and even before in some cases – these museums educated throngs of ordinary Americans with a specific vision of American history. Contemporary visitor statistics indicate that these sites enjoyed enthusiastic visitation, which carried on through the Depression. A 1932 estimate of Mount Vernon's attendance indicated that on average 1,500 visitors per day walked through its gates. This number jumped to 5,000 on holidays and popular vacation days. In 1937, the rural and

⁴⁹ "Debt-Free Stratford Seen by Next Autumn," *The Washington Post*, 21 November 1934, 15, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

⁵⁰ "Moves to Restore Lee Home," *New York Times*, 22 January 1925, 19, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2001).

relatively inaccessible Monticello enjoyed 100,000 visitors.⁵¹ Arlington House always has benefited from the substantial visitation of Arlington National Cemetery.

As these numbers of visitors would indicate, tourism to these sites extended well beyond the elite women and men that participated in their preservation. One author described the museum visitors at the homes of Jefferson, Washington and Andrew Jackson:

In the press of visitors are young and old and middle-aged, rich and poor, grandparents, small boys and girls, paired lovers, honeymooners, college and high school groups shepherded by spectacled pundits, Rotarians and snooty despisers of such common get-together folk, professional lady patriots, prying interior decorators, city people and country people from all over the United States and from many other parts of the world. Perhaps the majority are just sightseers doing another sight, but many in the mixed lot are not insensible to the patriotic stirrings. Some – a very considerable number – are getting educated one way or another. It may be in history, period furniture, architecture, landscaping, gardening, old customs and manners and morals.⁵²

Forgiving the author his romantic language, it is clear that historic house museums in the 1920s and 1930s were sites of public learning that were enjoyed by numerous and various Americans. These museum interpretations, therefore, helped to build and further a specific narrative of American history. Further analysis of the messages portrayed at these museums will show that in determining their site's history, the museum founders and administrators were as concerned with contemporary events as they were with the lives of their sites' illustrious occupants.

⁵¹ H.I. Brock. "Living Monuments to Three Presidents," *New York Times*, 18 September 1932, SM9, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2003); William R. Wranek. "Monticello Lives Anew," *New York Times* 10 April 1938, 165, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2003).

⁵² Brock, SM9.

As is to be expected following the lengthy efforts to save and subsequently restore Mount Vernon and Monticello, the early tours of these homes were concerned primarily with the physical structure of the house and the objects within it. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, for example, guests simply walked through Monticello without a tour guide.⁵³ Maud Littleton's desire "to keep Monticello as a national shrine – to open its doors that no man may shut them," was taken literally and providing access to the house sufficiently met the goals of the TJMF. The 1921 edition of "An Illustrated Handbook of Mount Vernon" shows a similar preoccupation with the house and the task of restoration. The introduction to the "Handbook" was primarily concerned with the house itself. In fact, George Washington appeared only as one of the owners of the mansion. The "Handbook" began,

In the year 1674, by Grant of Lord Culpepper, a tract of 5,000 acres situated on the west bank of the Potomac River, fifteen miles south of the present city of Washington, became the property of John Washington and Nicholas Spencer. Half of this tract, or 2,500 acres, descended to Lawrence Washington, who in 1743, built a residence, and named the estate Mount Vernon, after the British Admiral under whom he had served. At Lawrence Washington's death (1752) the estate passed to the ownership of his half brother, George Washington, who subsequently extended the boundaries of his plantation until they included nearly 8,000 acres.

In 1799, when George Washington died, the property passed as a life interest to his widow, by whose will most of the household effects in the Mansion were, after her death, divided among her four grandchildren. Thus was the original furniture of Mount Vernon eventually scattered.

After a discussion of the MVLA's successful efforts to acquire the house, the

"Handbook" narrative turned to the enormity of the task of restoring and preserving the

⁵³ Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., "Report to the Ad Hoc Committee on Interpretation" (1977 or 1978), 11, quoted in Linda Retallack, "Did It Happen? Does It Matter? The Controversial Interpretation of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings" (Thesis, State University of New York College at Oneonta, 2002), 12.

structure itself: “Among the many who visit Mount Vernon few are aware of what an expensive undertaking is involved in its restoration and preservation...” The remainder of the introduction explained the necessity and unobtrusiveness of modern conveniences such as the heating, electrical, and sprinkler systems. In this published guide to Mount Vernon, the MVLA took for granted that guests would be familiar with the significance of George Washington as a figure of American history. While the introduction made reference to the need to “preserve his hallowed shrine,” it did not explain why Americans should consider his house or life a significant part of a shared cultural heritage.⁵⁴ The same can be said of Monticello, which similarly took its status as a “shrine” for granted by providing no interpretation that would elucidate Thomas Jefferson’s place in the narrative of American history.

While Mount Vernon’s interpretation was certainly preoccupied with the MVLA’s preservation efforts, guests who visited the site likely received both the story of the house itself and anecdotal recollections about the life of George Washington. Harrison Howell Dodge’s 1932 book entitled, *Mount Vernon: Its Owner and Its Story*, provides celebratory anecdotes about Washington’s life. Dodge was the Resident Custodian of Mount Vernon from 1885 through 1937. In this capacity, Dodge led tours through the mansion and his narrative likely resembles the type of historical scholarship that accompanied the restoration, preservation, and initial interpretation of Mount Vernon.⁵⁵ Dodge’s description of the mansion’s dining room provides a useful example

⁵⁴ Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, *An Illustrated Handbook of Mount Vernon* (Virginia: MVLA, 1921), 1-2.

⁵⁵ Hosmer relates the fact that Dodge led the tour when Mary Longyear, the preservationist responsible for saving the home of Mary Baker Eddy, visited Mount Vernon. See Hosmer, 60.

of this interpretation because it is grounded both in the home's furnishings and contributes to Washington's mythic stature. The description of the dining room includes the story of the marble mantle, which was sent to Washington from an Italian sculptor named Canova. The mantle, Dodge says, was captured by pirates on its way to Virginia and only arrived at Mount Vernon because "so great was the renown of the man to whom [the package was] consigned, that, at some considerable risk to themselves, the pirates arranged to have the gift...forwarded to its proper destination."⁵⁶

A similar interpretation could be found at Monticello beginning in the late 1930s, when guests began to be accompanied by "negro hostesses" who provided some information about the house's famous residents. Published articles about Jefferson indicate the kind of narrative that encapsulated his life and legacy at Monticello.⁵⁷ For example, "Twilight At Monticello," an article that appeared in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* in 1941, is a sentimental and adoring collection of stories that details Jefferson's last years at Monticello and his relationships with his grandchildren.⁵⁸ A 1966 article indicates that the narrative surrounding the museum also celebrated Jefferson's genius by examining the many inventions in the house. An article that appeared in *National Geographic* noted the "ingenious" seven-day clock in the front hall. Jefferson designed the clock, whereby cannonball weights would descend past six metal plates that were marked with a day of the week. On Saturday, the weights disappeared through a hall of

⁵⁶Harrison Howell Dodge, *Mount Vernon: Its Owner and Its Story* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1932), 30.

⁵⁷Retallack notes that the "Report to the Ad Hoc Committee" refers to this information as apocryphal stories. Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., "Report to the Ad Hoc Committee on Interpretation" (1977 or 1978), 11, quoted in Retallack, 12.

⁵⁸Retallack also briefly discusses this article. Barbara Mayo, *Twilight at Monticello*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 17:4 (Fall 1941): 502.

the floor into the basement.⁵⁹ The interpretations at both Mount Vernon and Monticello, therefore, uncritically celebrated the lives of Washington and Jefferson.

The ease with which the MVLA and the TJMF planned their celebratory interpretations was not the experience of every museum administrator. While Arlington House was preserved because of its association with Robert E. Lee, the house was also tied to the Washington family. It was, in fact, built by George Washington Parke Custis, Martha Washington's grandson from her first marriage. Custis's daughter, Mary Anna Randolph Custis married Robert E. Lee at the estate in 1831 and the couple moved into the Arlington home. Because of its ties to both the Lee and Washington family, the War Department suffered from conflicting loyalties as it planned the initial restoration of Arlington House. The legislation that authorized the restoration of the Lee Mansion was clear. The War Department was authorized to restore the house "to the condition in which it existed immediately prior to the Civil War and to procure, if possible, articles of furniture which were then in the mansion, with a view to restoring the appearance of the interior of the mansion to the condition of its occupancy of the Lee family." Despite this legislative imperative, the initial interpretation of the mansion focused on the "period style of the Custis family" and prohibited any furnishings that dated to after 1830.⁶⁰

The decision to focus solely on the early republic and disregard the Lee presence entirely was the work of Charles Moore, Chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts (CFA). As the restoration of Arlington House got underway, the War Department turned

⁵⁹ Joseph Judge, "Mr. Jefferson's Monticello," *National Geographic* 130, No. 3 (September 1966): 429-430.

⁶⁰ *Public Resolution No. 74, 68th Congress* (H.J. Res 264), quoted in Kinzey, 25; Dwight Davis to Charles Moore, 15 August 1925, Records of the CFA, copy in Arlington House Archives, quoted in Kinzey, 25; *Washington Evening Star*, 14 July 1929, quoted in Kinzey, 26.

over much of the restoration and preservation decisions to Moore. As Karen Kinzey argues in “Battle for Arlington House: To Lee or Not to Lee,” Moore’s personal decision was motivated by the popularity of the Colonial Revival movement and not any particular admiration of Custis.⁶¹ Moore’s instincts, in fact, were not out of line with the public’s wishes. While some guests were incredulous at the absence of Robert E. Lee within the house, the public seemed ready to accept this colonial interpretation.⁶² Articles about the restoration virtually abandoned the focus on Robert E. Lee that characterized the articles calling for the preservation of the home. Instead, these articles gave detailed descriptions of the home during the Custis occupation. One article suggested that the Lee and Custis interpretations would co-exist within the house. This article called the mansion “one of the few grand mansions of the old Virginia planter days,” and primarily favored an early interpretation of the house asserting, “Furniture or relics of a period later than the early nineteenth century must have some immediate association with the Lee family to find a place in the house.” An anecdotal and nostalgic article about the “long and romantic history” of the Lee Mansion devoted over a page to a description of the life of Custis and only a single paragraph to Robert E. Lee.⁶³

Despite public interest in Custis, this interpretation was short-lived. In the early 1930s, the restoration of Arlington House was given to the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, which moved to restore the home as a memorial to Robert E.

⁶¹ Kinzey, 25-26.

⁶² At least one visitor from Pennsylvania wrote to protest the lack of a mention of Robert E. Lee. Kinzey, 27.

⁶³ “Arlington House to Be Restored,” *New York Times*, 13 Oct. 1929, X17, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2001); “The Romantic History of Arlington,” *The Washington Post*, 23 March 1930, SM5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

Lee. The Park Service argued that “Robert E. Lee’s fame so overshadows that of George Washington Parke Custis that in the minds of the people of the United States, and especially those of the South, Arlington House is Lee’s Mansion. This is a fact that must be recognized.” The National Park Service, which had also acquired Arlington Cemetery from the War Department, embarked on an interpretation that would focus on the Lee family.⁶⁴ To be sure, Custis, and his link to George Washington, remained an important part of Arlington House’s history. In fact, an early interpretive guide devoted an entire section to “The Memory of George Washington Kept Alive at Arlington” which was described as “the successor of Mount Vernon as the ‘Washington Treasury’”.⁶⁵ Still, this interpretation largely focused on the physical restoration of the house to the antebellum period as the NPS sought to furnish the structure with period or quality reproduction furniture.

Administrators at each of these museums were affected by much more than their desire to celebrate their site’s illustrious past. In fact, the interpretations reflected their feelings about the country’s future as much as they did the country’s past. World War I in particular, had a dramatic effect on museum interpretation at these early shrines. As the country reeled from the brutality of total war, popular culture responded in a variety of different ways. In particular, the war bred disillusionment among many Americans. This disillusionment was recognized and represented by artists, writers, and journalists in the 1920s. For example, in his nostalgic depiction of the decade in *Only Yesterday*,

⁶⁴ Robert F. Lee to Enoch A. Chase, 29 July 1929, National Park Service files, copy in Arlington House Archives, quoted in Kinzey 29.

⁶⁵ Murray H. Nelligan, *Custis-Lee Mansion: The Robert E. Lee Memorial* [book on-line], Historical Handbook Series, No. 6 (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1952, accessed 13 December 2005); available from http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/hh/6/index.htm; Internet.

Frederick Lewis Allen credited the chaos of war with providing the impetus for the decade's rising hemlines and loose morals: "A whole generation has been infected by the eat-drink-and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-we-die spirit which accompanied the soldiers to the training camps and fighting front."⁶⁶ In Allen's view, the disruption of the war returned from the front with the soldiers and brought with it radical changes in society and politics.

For many Americans, including many associated with historical memory and preservation, the war had the exact opposite effect of signaling nostalgia for a simpler past and not a radical future. This nostalgia sparked a preservation aesthetic that led many Americans to collect all manner of Americana from antique furniture to silver spoons. It was also responsible for a national preservation ethic that sought to save virtually every building that could be deemed historic.⁶⁷ Speaking in 1923 of his purchase and restoration of the historic Wayside Inn in Sudbury, Massachusetts, Henry Ford described his philanthropic impulse: "I'm trying in a small way to help America take a step, even if it is a little one, toward the saner and sweeter idea of life that prevailed in prewar days."⁶⁸ A 1916 article about Mount Vernon played upon this theme when it described the house as "the one place in America which shall not change."⁶⁹ In

⁶⁶ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday* (New York: Bantam Books, 1931), 66.

⁶⁷ For a complete discussion of the impact of nostalgia on historic preservation see "Part Three: Circa 1915 to 1945," Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). Kammen asserts that during this period the tension between traditionalism and modernity manifested itself in a "nostalgic modernism" whereby innovation and tradition were both bolstered by their criticisms of one another. Kammen, 300.

⁶⁸ Walter Karp, "Greenfield Village," *American Heritage* 32 (December 1980): 101-102, quoted in Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 10.

⁶⁹ "One Place in America That Is Changeless," *New York Times*, 8 October 1916, SM7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2003).

Dodge's book about the history of Mount Vernon, the author transformed anxiety about current events into nostalgia for the seemingly simpler past. In discussing the functionality of the Mount Vernon kitchen, Dodge referred to the kitchen equipment as "exceedingly primitive" but still mused that "there never was more deliciously cooked food than that from the great open hearths."⁷⁰ In fact, in Dodge's view, the principle value of Mount Vernon was that, "as we move further and further away from the Washington period, this perfect reminder of it is able still to carry us back, that its atmosphere is potent to keep alive the fine and essential traditions which knit together a nation."⁷¹ Similarly, a review of Arlington House advocated a visit to the site as a reminder to "speedy-paced moderns" of "a time when it was not a tragic thing to be old." The inconveniences of the past are romanticized in the article, which mused "Perhaps the fireplaces blazed for hours before the high rooms were warmed. No plumbing is in evidence. But still people in the halls comment, as they look into the rooms, that it mightn't be so bad living there after all."⁷²

Nostalgia for a simpler past was not the only way in which World War I affected public memory and museum interpretation. In fact, closely tied to World War I was a concern over the increasing diversity and incoherence within the nation state following the war. This concern was exacerbated by perceived socialist agitation by labor unions and the subsequent Red Scare as well as by the resumption of large scale immigration after World War I. In 1921 alone, for example, 800,000 immigrants arrived in the United

⁷⁰ Dodge, 71.

⁷¹ Dodge, 222.

⁷² "Lee's Mansion Holds Interests of D.C. Visitors," *The Washington Post*, F1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

States.⁷³ Allen captured some of this concern in his discussion of businessmen's reactions to labor organization following the war in *Only Yesterday*. Allen noted that the businessman "had come out of the war with his fighting blood up, ready to lick the next thing that stood in his way...He had come out of the war with a militant patriotism;...he developed a fervent belief that 100-percent Americanism and the Welfare of God's Own Country and Loyalty to the Teachings of the Founding Fathers implied the right of the business man to kick the union organizer out of his workshop." In addition, according to Allen, the war had taught Americans to be wary of immigrants and to "distrust anything and everything that was foreign," to attribute radicalism to "long-haired Slavs and unwashed East-Side Jews," and to be suspicious of German sympathizers who had "signaled to one another with lights from mountain-tops and put ground glass into surgical dressings" during the war.⁷⁴ These lingering effects of World War I suspicions were not the only factors that affected many Americans' views on immigrants. The sheer number of immigrants and their foreign customs were threatening to the American way of life. In 1920, Ohio Representative B.F. Welty argued for immigration restriction saying that the newcomers had "come to pull our civilization down to their level" and threaten "the very soul of the nation".⁷⁵

Fears over the radical influence and "foreign-ness" of immigrants made their way into the interpretations at many museums. As we have seen, the very effort to save

⁷³ James L. Roark and others, *The American Promise: A History of the United States*, 3d. ed. (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 850. See also Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).

⁷⁴ Allen, 34.

⁷⁵ "Urges Ban on Immigration," *The Washington Post*, 11 December 1920, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1990).

Monticello was bolstered by fears of “foreign” control over the sacred landmark. In many cases, this same anxiety influenced interpretations as museums sought to create programs that would ensure the Americanization of diverse populations of immigrants. This lofty goal was sometimes an awkward fit at the homes of the more radical founders. In the case of Monticello, TJMF board member Edward Albee stated that Monticello’s interpretation would make it “an active agency of relentless war against the dangerous radicalisms of our time, when the teachings of Jefferson are needed as never before in the history of our country.”⁷⁶ Of course, those familiar with Jeffersonian history recognized the incongruity of making the home of one of America’s foremost radicals into a bastion of conservative public policy. The Thomas Jefferson who once stated that, “I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical” had been domesticated for the American public.

Historic sites also protected the American way by focusing on a traditional American narrative. Many viewed Mount Vernon for example, as the surviving link to the spirit of Washington and the American ideals which he helped to advance. In his introduction to Dodge’s book, author Owen Wister described Mount Vernon’s spiritual power as its “benign influence upon the true American spirit is spread through the American people.” Dodge himself noted, “This simple house, from which the memory of its great owner has never departed, is more perfect in that it is a part of him and a continuance of his life.” Wister’s and Dodge’s view of the power of Mount Vernon as a symbol of traditional American values was shared by those not intimately connected to

⁷⁶ *New York Herald*, 23 September 1928, quoted in West, 111.

the site. A 1932 *New York Times* article carried a similar theme about the importance of Washington's home and claimed a visit to Mount Vernon was like being "in the presence of the man himself" because the house "expressed his ideals of life as he was never able to express them as public leader and public servant."⁷⁷

The interpretation at Mount Vernon stressed Washington's connection to the traditional and supposedly unique American values such as hard work, ingenuity, and education that were the cornerstones of "American exceptionalism." This idea, although implicit in American culture for many years, became articulated in the 1920s as a belief in a distinct American character and destiny.⁷⁸ An anecdote from Dodge's book exemplifies how Washington was connected to these values. Dodge noted how Washington was personally involved in running the farm and its ancillary industries on the plantation. In his quest to make the farm more efficient, he kept records of his many inventions that would make arduous chores easier. Washington's ingenuity paid off with his invention of an octagonal barn used for storing and threshing grain. The gigantic barn, whose diameter equaled that of the Capitol rotunda, allowed Washington's animals and slaves to process the grain during inclement weather. According to Dodge, Washington's invention "revolutionized the old-fashioned and precarious" methods used to process grain. Interestingly, in this particular anecdote, Washington's ingenuity was contrasted with his slaves' reluctance to change their methods and habits. Dodge's story ended with "Mars' George" arriving unexpectedly to find his slaves ignoring his new invention and processing grain using the old fashioned methods. As Dodge noted, "The

⁷⁷ Dodge, 7; Dodge, 19; Brock, "Living Monuments to three Presidents," SM9.

⁷⁸ Kammen, 303-304.

thunder and lightning [of a sudden rain storm] were nothing compared to the expressed disapproval and rage of the master.”⁷⁹ This anecdote served a dual purpose. It both connected Washington and Mount Vernon to fundamental American ideals and excluded African Americans from a shared belief in those very same ideals. This is a topic that we will return to later.

Despite museums’ different approaches to their individual histories, accuracy and authenticity were at the cornerstone of their interpretations. As is evidenced by the anecdotal and mythic interpretations at many of these sites, their founders were only concerned with the authenticity of the objects presented and not the message that was associated with them. Concern with this narrowly defined authenticity drove much of the early administration, organization, and interpretation at sites ranging from Mount Vernon to small local museums.⁸⁰ This preoccupation with authenticity was entirely in line with the ideas of the academic historians. By the turn of the twentieth century, history was rapidly approaching professionalization. The American Historical Association and the *American Historical Review* emerged by 1900 to set a standard by which historians and their work could be judged. By 1928, amateur historians with little or no formal training had been replaced by university trained Ph.D.s.⁸¹ As Peter Novick argues in *That Noble Dream*, the notion of “objectivity” served as both the attainable goal of the new professional historians and the standard by which their work was judged by the historic

⁷⁹ Dodge, 36-37.

⁸⁰ Kammen, 373.

⁸¹ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 48.

community.⁸² Edward P. Cheyney, who served as President of the American Historical Association in 1923, offered an architectural analogy to describe the historian's craft: "he builds a classic temple: simple, severe, symmetrical in its lines, surrounded by the clear, bright light of truth, pervaded by the spirit of moderation. Every historical fact is a stone hewn from the quarry of past records; it must be solid and square and even-hued – an ascertained fact."⁸³ Professional historians shared Cheyney's view that the historical record was made up of a series of incontrovertible facts and the historian's job was to assemble those facts into an objective view of the past.

The belief that history was a collection of indisputable facts heavily influenced the first interpretations at historic house museums. If historians wrote history by gathering objective facts and written evidence, then museum administrators could create an accurate history at their sites by assembling authentic objects and furnishings. Both professional historians and museum administrators believed that the historical record, if created using authentic objects or facts, was irrefutable. Administrators in charge of the restoration and interpretation of the homes of Lee, Jefferson, and Washington were therefore optimistic about their ability to create a wholly authentic experience. At Arlington House, advocates for restoration noted the inaccuracy of the interior as a reason to restore the home as a shrine to Lee. An article about the movement stated, "That in contrast to Mount Vernon this noble mansion which has a history dating back to the early days of the nineteenth century is not placed in as favorable a light as regards its lack of

⁸² See Chapter 3 "Consensus and Legitimation" in *That Noble Dream* for Novick's discussion of the uses of objectivity in early professional history.

⁸³ Cheyney, address delivered to Graduate School of University of Pennsylvania, 3 October 1907, reprinted as "What Is History?" in *the History Teacher's Magazine* 2 (December 1910): 79, quoted in Novick, 56.

correct setting and equipment. At present time, the rooms of Arlington...are bare of the historic pieces of furniture and its original splendid appearance is spoiled thereby.”⁸⁴

National Park Service correspondence shows that the site’s administrators were similarly bothered by the fact that “the passage of time and the nature of many of the events that occurred there, have combined to obscure many phases of its history.”⁸⁵ The physical recreation of Arlington House’s interior was hampered by the parallel objectives of those in charge of Mount Vernon as, “Much of the furniture in Arlington House before the Civil War, however, had been brought there by the Custis family from Mount Vernon, and has since been returned to that place through the efforts of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association.” Arlington’s preservationists therefore had to settle for “American pieces of genuine period.”⁸⁶ Still, site administrators created a plan “to accumulate the fragments of information, to rediscover the forgotten episodes, and finally to combine all that is known into a form in which it may be easily used”. This plan stressed the “completeness and accuracy” of the information.⁸⁷

At Monticello, tracking down authentic Jefferson pieces was the primary preoccupation of the museum. In 1966, curator James Bear noted that “Monticello’s

⁸⁴ “Lee’s Famous Mansion that Women Hope to Restore as Others Did Mount Vernon,” *The Washington Post*, 7 August 1921, 7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

⁸⁵ “United States Department of the Interior National Park Service Memo,” 16 May 1949, Folder: Arlington House (Custis-Lee Mansion) Correspondence 1929-1959, National Park Service Offices, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁶ “Arlington House to Be Restored,” *New York Times*, 13 October 1929, X17, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2001).

⁸⁷ United States Department of the Interior National Park Service Memo, 16 May 1949, Folder: Arlington House (Custis-Lee Mansion) Correspondence 1929-1959, National Park Service Offices, Washington, D.C. Stratford Plantation combined their quest for increasing authenticity with capitalism by reviving colonial industries on the site such as curing hams and selling the products to increase revenue. See “Lee Home is Reviving Its Colonial Industries,” *New York Times*, 4 October 1932, D2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2001).

treasures drifted away” in an effort to pay off debt following Jefferson’s death. To date, the museum had managed to collect 168 pieces of furniture and 247 Jefferson mementos that were featured in the house. Highlighting the importance of objects associated with Jefferson, Bear kept a map of the United States with color-coded pushpins to denote the location of items from Monticello. There was apparently little strategic plan associated with the artifacts that the museum acquired. Bear noted that in 1961, the TJMF bought “a brace of pocket pistols, some silver spoons, a leg bone of a mastodon, a small table, a water color, one of a pair of dumbbells, spectacles with tinted glasses, a pocket balance, and a portable wine chest.”⁸⁸

Perhaps no museum was more preoccupied with authenticity than Mount Vernon, however. This was largely due to the fact that accuracy was a particular obsession of Ann Cunningham. Even in 1921, almost fifty years after Cunningham’s resignation as regent, the *Handbook* remained pre-occupied with the authenticity of objects. Its description of the West Parlor is representative of the room descriptions in general and reflects the tenor of the tours that were given:

The finish of this room – its wall panels, mantel and ceiling decoration – is a restoration of the original. Washington’s coat of arms is carved above the mantle, and his crest and initials are cast in the heavy fireback. An old painting empaneled over the mantle is said to represent part of Admiral Vernon’s fleet at Cartagena, and was sent by the Admiral to Lawrence Washington in 1743 as an acknowledgement of Washington’s courtesy in naming the estate for him.

The rug in the room is particularly interesting. It was woven by order of Louis XVI, and sent by him as a present to General Washington.

The curtain cornices are original, also the mirror now restored to its former position between the windows.

⁸⁸ Judge, 430, 436.

Among the articles of interest gathered by Mrs. Mary T. Leiter, late Vice-Regent for Illinois, are several of the old chairs and a reprint of an engraving of Louis XVI.

The old piano and handsome French clock are contemporaneous but did not belong to the Washingtons.⁸⁹

Apparently, if the rooms were not furnished with authentic objects, they were not worth discussing. The description of the second floor rooms which were fully furnished states only that they “contain but little original furniture, although all of the articles are of historic importance and represent the correct type of the colonial period.”⁹⁰

Harrison Howell Dodge, who in his narrative about Mount Vernon was similarly concerned with the authenticity of the restoration, asserted “I believe if General Washington were to return to-day he would find his house just as he knew it in its best period.” The discovery of an inventory of the home in the 1920s or 1930s further aided the MVLA in their quest for complete authenticity and led to an interpretive innovation whereby “by cards marked ‘Original’ one may now quickly discern the Washington furniture.”⁹¹

The Place of Slavery in Early Interpretations

Mount Vernon, Monticello, Arlington House, and Stratford Plantation were founded by those who wished to enshrine their historical subjects and put forth a specific narrative of American history. Their celebratory narratives stressed traditional values such as hard work and ingenuity, the heroism of historical actors, and the country’s pre-

⁸⁹ *An Illustrated Handbook of Mount Vernon*, 1921, 11.

⁹⁰ *An Illustrated Guide to Mount Vernon*, 1921, 20.

⁹¹ Dodge, 57.

destined path to greatness. They were supported by a façade of authenticity that measured accuracy solely by the genuineness of the antiques presented and not by the complexity or veracity of the narrative that surrounded them. In addition, these interpretations were designed to foster a unified post-bellum culture for northern and southern whites and to bolster American patriotism in the face of a devastating world war and increasing immigration. Given this interpretive atmosphere it is not surprising that any meaningful discussion of slavery, as a divisive chapter in American history that could not be celebrated, is absent from these early interpretations.

The exclusion of African American history was not unique to the museum industry. Professional historians either ignored the contributions of African Americans or used them as a foil to discuss the common contributions of white Americans and the same sectional reconciliation that was evidenced by the founding of Arlington House and Stratford Plantation occurred within the professional historic community. This academic reconciliation, however, did not revolve around a veneration of Robert E. Lee but was instead predicated on a shared view of black inferiority, a concept that had grounding in both the sciences and social sciences at the time. Social anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor developed his theory of social evolution in his 1871 book *Primitive Culture*. Tylor theorized that cultures went through distinct evolutionary stages that could be categorized as savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Technological advances and the complexity of social structures were just some of the criteria that were used to place European-derived cultures in the “civilized” category and many African cultures in the “savage” category. Scientists such as Louis Agassiz were similarly convinced that African Americans had

certain “natural propensities and mental abilities” that made racial equality a “natural impossibility.”⁹² Professional historians were undoubtedly influenced by this thinking and began criticizing “the policy of trying to make negroes intelligent by legislative acts.”⁹³ This racism found its clearest expression in accounts of slavery and Reconstruction. Historians such as Ulrich B. Phillips and William A. Dunning presented a utopian view of plantation life and described slaves as “submissive” and “amiable.”⁹⁴ This view influenced popular textbooks:

Sambo, whose wrongs moved the abolitionists to wrath and tears...suffered less than any other class in the South from its “peculiar institution.”...The majority of slaves were...apparently happy...There was much to be said for slavery as a transitional status between barbarism and civilization. The negro learned his master’s language, and accepted in some degree his moral and religious standards. In return he contributed much besides his labor – music and humor for instance – to American civilization.⁹⁵

Depictions of Reconstruction were similarly sympathetic to the former Confederacy.

William Dunning’s 1907 *Reconstruction: Political and Economic* set the tone for Reconstruction scholarship. Sectional reconciliation among academics was achieved by the consensus that Reconstruction had been an atrocity whereby, “Vindictive radicals imposed on the prostrate South a regime of humiliation, corruption, and exploitation by carpetbaggers, ‘scalawags,’ and impudent freedmen.”⁹⁶ In this narrative, African Americans were characterized by their inept and corrupt governance and insatiable lust

⁹² Agassiz to Samuel G. Howe, quoted in James Ford Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the Final Restoration of Home Rule in the south in 1877* (8 vols., New York, 1906), 6:37, quoted in Novick, 74.

⁹³ Albert Bushnell Hart, quoted in James M. McPherson, *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (Princeton, 1975), 337-338, quoted in Novick, 75.

⁹⁴ U.B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1918), 291-92, quoted in Novick, 229.

⁹⁵ Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic* (New York, 1920), 415, 418, quoted in Novick, 229.

⁹⁶ Novick, 231.

for helpless white women. The end of Reconstruction in 1877 signaled northern acceptance of natural black inferiority and allowed white southerners to direct their own affairs. Despite the appearance of dissenting viewpoints, most notably, W.E.B. DuBois' *Black Reconstruction in America*, the Dunning school of thought persisted for decades, characterizing both Americans' views on Reconstruction and African Americans.

DuBois's *Black Reconstruction* appeared in 1935, but as early as 1915 black historians recognized the problems with the way that African Americans were depicted in the nation's culture. Carter G. Woodson started the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in September of that year and started publishing *The Quarterly Journal of Negro History* in 1916. Through the Association and the *Journal*, Woodson was able to marshal an impressive collection of black scholars to counter the racist theories that prevailed in the white academy.⁹⁷ In a 1916 study entitled *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture: A Study in Interpretation*, Freeman Morris Murray pondered the absence of African Americans in the nation's collective culture, writing, "When we look at a work of art, especially when 'we' [African- Americans] look at one in which Black Folk appear – or do not appear when they should – we should ask: what does it mean? What does it suggest? What impression is it likely to make on those who view it? What will be the effect on present-day problems, of its obvious and also of its insidious teachings?"⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Jacqueline Goggin, "Countering White Racist Scholarship: Carter G. Woodson and the Journal of Negro History," *The Journal of Negro History* 68, no. 4 (Autumn 1983): 355-375.

⁹⁸ Freeman Henry Morris Murray, *Emancipation and the Freed in American Sculpture: A Study in Interpretation* (1916; Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1972; reprint *Washington Tribune*, 6 January 1923), xix, quoted in Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson. *Monuments to the Lost Cause:*

The exclusion of African Americans from displays of the nation's shared cultural heritage was part of an overall system of segregation that sought to separate black and white Americans by creating separate public spaces and cultures. The 1896 Supreme Court decision, *Plessy vs. Ferguson* legitimized the de facto segregation that followed the Civil War by declaring that separate but equal facilities for the races were constitutional. In the southern United States, *Plessy vs. Ferguson* was used to justify the decidedly separate and unequal public accommodations and opportunities that were open to black and white Americans. The northern states were not a bastion of equality either, however. Increasing diversity in the North, caused by the migration of black southerners and the immigration of southern and eastern Europeans, created anxiety among the white native-born community who marginalized these new populations in urban ghettos and undesirable jobs.

Black Americans were similarly marginalized in the nation's public culture. *Gone With the Wind*, still the nation's iconic image of the antebellum South and the system of slavery that defined it, appeared in print and film in the 1930s.⁹⁹ The story captivated the nation. Author Margaret Mitchell won the 1937 Pulitzer Prize and the film, still the highest grossing movie of all time, won ten Academy Awards. Interestingly, this piece of popular culture even spawned its own museum, The *Gone With the Wind* Museum in Marietta, Georgia. The story's place as the dominant narrative of the antebellum South is problematic, however. Characters such as Mammy portray slaves as

Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1923), 215.

⁹⁹ Margaret Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind* was published in 1936. The David O. Selznick film version was released in 1939.

happy and loyal. In addition, while the system of slavery is present in the book and movie, it serves as the background for the opulent lifestyles of the white characters and not as an historic subject itself. This lack of any critical representation of the institution renders it benign, especially when placed within the decadent and romantic backdrop of the Old South that pervades the story's antebellum scenes.¹⁰⁰

Part of *Gone With the Wind's* popularity can be attributed to the fact that its depiction of slavery and the antebellum South contributed to an American narrative that was appealing to many Americans - the same narrative of American exceptionalism, reconciliation, and democratic values, that was present at museums during this period. Mitchell's depiction of slaves and slavery was not new. In the contested atmosphere of the post-bellum South, this image of slavery was marshaled in order to bolster the Lost Cause narrative of the war and a celebratory narrative of American culture. Southern commemorative organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans sought to build memorials in honor of faithful slaves. These early twentieth-century initiatives were motivated by the contemporary desire to define the meaning and memory of slavery and not by any allegiance to historical fact or former slaves. The 1896 monument to faithful slaves in Fort Mill, South Carolina exemplifies many of these motivations. Adorned with the images of a male slave resting after a day in the fields and a female slave lovingly cradling a white child, the monument is dedicated to:

¹⁰⁰ Other authors have commented on these aspects of *Gone With the Wind*. See, for example, Grace Elizabeth Hale, "Stone Mountains: Lillian Smith, Margaret Mitchell, and Whiteness Divided," in *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

The faithful slaves who, loyal to a sacred trust, toiled for the support of the army, with matchless devotion; and with sterling fidelity guarded our defenseless homes, women and children, during the struggle for the principles of our 'Confederate States of America.'”¹⁰¹

The memorial’s builder, the prominent Confederate veteran Samuel White, hoped that the monument would “teach generations yet unborn that though black in skin, and servile in station, there existed between the negro and the master a bond of love broken only by death.”¹⁰² The dedication of the monument featured orators who were known for their views on the “true” effects of the Civil War which “took out of [a slave’s] life those rays of sunshine which made him not only the happiest creature on earth, but the subject of story and song which delight the people of the South who knew him, loved him, and whose like the world will never, never see again.”¹⁰³

In 1924, the Daughters of the Confederacy tried to insert their specific view of benign slavery into the holy land of American civil religion, Washington D.C, when they asked the Senate for land on which they could erect a monument to southern mammies. The Daughters of the Confederacy advocated for the sculpture using language that echoed White’s reasoning decades earlier. They stated that the monument would commemorate mammies’ “love of masters, mistresses, and their children,” and their

¹⁰¹ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 157. Savage offers a complete discussion of the meaning of the Fort Mill monuments. He argues that monuments such as the Fort Mill faithful slave monument exemplify the southern belief that slavery was worthy of commemoration because it represented a golden age of race relations. These monuments, erected by wealthy white southerners, present a sanitized view of slavery that stress the affection between masters and slaves. See also Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson eds., *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003) for a discussion of Confederate memorials in general.

¹⁰² *Rock Hill Herald*, 23 May 1896, 3, quoted in Savage, 158.

¹⁰³ Polk Miller, “Krismus ‘Fo De Wah,” *Richmond Dispatch*, 22 December 1895, clipping in Polk Miller Scrapbooks, 2:34, Country Music Foundation Library, Nashville, TN, quoted in Savage, 160.

“devotion to owners.”¹⁰⁴ By the 1920s however, the image of the faithful mammy had profound implications as a commentary on the rightful place of African Americans in the country’s civic life.¹⁰⁵ Just as museum administrators sought to foster the assimilation and Americanization of immigrants through their programming, the mammy monument offered a particular view of the rightful role for African Americans. As Micki McElya argues in *Monuments to the Lost Cause*, the profoundly domestic mammy figure effectively barred black women from the public civic culture that was offered to them by the passage of the suffrage amendment. In addition, it sought to inculcate specific values in African Americans. One monument supporter stated, “If the negroes of the present generation and generations to follow, measure up [to mammy] in citizenship, character, intellect, dependability, industry, and godly living, they, as well as the white people of this country, will have a right to feel that they are doing mighty well.” The irony of attributing values of citizenship to women who were barred from that same citizenship was apparently lost on the supporters. Furthermore, while the Americanization of immigrants stressed the more universal, if idyllic, American traits of independence, hard work, and intellect, the image of mammy was used to advocate for the servile and

¹⁰⁴Mrs. G. Gilliland Aston, “A Monument to the Faithful Old Slaves,” *Confederate Veteran* 12, no. 9 (Sept. 1904): 443, quoted in Micki McElya, “Commemorating the Color Line: The National Mammy Monument Controversy of the 1920s” in *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*, eds. Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 206.

¹⁰⁵ Jo-Ann Morgan argues in “Mammy the Huckster: Selling the Old South for the New Century,” *American Art* 9, No. 1 (Spring, 1995): 87-109 that the mammy image in advertising was itself a reunifying figure because mammy continued her service to her northern employer and provided a solution for how to incorporate slaves into post-emancipation America. See also Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 108.

subordinate position of African Americans in the nation's public culture.¹⁰⁶ By portraying an image of slavery that stressed bonds of affection between master and slave, the mammy monument also served to vindicate the United States from a particularly shameful chapter of its history. The myth of the faithful slave and mammy promoted a domestic and benign image of slavery that was convenient for those who sought to celebrate American history and enshrine the founding fathers, many of whom were slaveholders, as symbols of liberty.

Ironically, instead of the docile behavior that the mammy image promoted, the potential mammy monument inspired a maelstrom of black activism in opposition to the sculpture. Neval Thomas, the head of the NAACP, flatly stated, "Democracy is the monument that the noble 'black mammy' wants erected to her, and not this marble shaft which can only be symbol of servitude."¹⁰⁷ In addition, an active black press portrayed the construction of the monument as an attack on black freedom akin to the lynchings that continued to victimize black men across the south. In their own portrayals of mummies, the black press stressed the violence of slavery including the raping of black women by white slaveowners. To counter the domestic image that the monument advocated, they portrayed the relationship between mummies and white children as one of servitude and forced labor: "The black mammy was often faithful in the service of her mistress's children while her heart bled over her own babies, who were thus deprived of

¹⁰⁶ This discussion of the Mammy Monument is taken from McElya; *Literary Digest* 28 (Apr. 1923): 48, quoted in McElya, 211.

¹⁰⁷ Neval H. Thomas, "Want No Black Mammy Monument," *California Eagle*, 17February 1923, quoted in McElya, 203.

their mother's ministrations and tender care, which the white children received."¹⁰⁸

While the Senate passed a bill that set aside land for the monument in 1923, opposition was strong enough that the bill languished in the House.

The mammy monument controversy exemplifies the racial atmosphere in which the museums operated in the early twentieth century. As sites of slavery, the museums discussed during this period had a stake in the public conversation about the topic. As shrines of patriotism, however, many of the museums followed the advice of Vassar College's Lucy M. Salmon who stated that in the discussion of national heroes, one should avoid "the presentation to children of...blemishes the world has gladly forgiven and forgotten for the sake of a great work accomplished and a noble life lived."¹⁰⁹ Many sites, therefore, discussed the work of slaves, generally using euphemistic terms such as "servants," but did not examine the lives of individual slaves or the experience of slavery. Instead, any discussion of slaves was used to celebrate the ingenuity or lifestyle of the home's famous occupant. It is not surprising that the slaves were not considered historical actors worthy of their own interpretation, however. The very stereotypes commonly associated with slaves such as ignorance, dependence, and servility contradicted the American character traits that were so much a part of these early museum interpretations.

National Geographic writer Joseph Judge's 1966 tour of Monticello with the site's lead hostess demonstrates some of the ways that slavery was discussed at the site.

¹⁰⁸ "For and Against the 'Black Mammy's' Monument," *Literary Digest* 28 (Apr. 1923): 48, quoted in McElya, 212. This analysis of the Mammy Monument is drawn from McElya's observations.

¹⁰⁹ Lucy Salmon, "Some Principles in the Teaching of History," *National Society for the Scientific Study of Education, Yearbook* 1 (1902): 51, quoted in Novick, 71.

Commenting on the site's outbuildings, Judge noted that many plantation houses were "surrounded, and often obscured by a motley group of service buildings – kitchen, smokehouse, slaves' quarters, stables, laundry room." At Monticello, however, the slave quarters and other outbuildings were invisible beneath "the sloping hillsides" of the mountain. Judge's mention of the quarters was thus used to celebrate Jefferson's architecture that "managed to hide virtually an entire estate under the brow of a mountaintop." Jefferson's placement of the service buildings also represented a "practical" innovation because, "There would be no need for a serving boy to dash against a mountain gale with a frozen salver of stony pork chops. Instead he carried the covered dish along the comfortable passageway under the terrace, continued up the hidden staircase, and placed the dish on his side of the revolving service door. At the flick of a wrist, a hot dinner was ready."¹¹⁰ Judge's reflection on the interpretation not only highlighted Jefferson's genius but also indicated that Jefferson's invention made the lives of Monticello's slaves easier. In many ways, therefore, the interpretation of Monticello resembled the place of slaves on the site when Jefferson was there. When possible, slaves and slavery were invisible. When it was necessary to acknowledge the presence of slaves, they contributed only to the comfort and celebration of the white family.

The interpretation at Mount Vernon is emblematic of the limited extent to which the "blemish" of slavery was discussed at these early shrines. An examination of Dodge's memoirs and the official Mount Vernon *Handbook*, the published guide to the

¹¹⁰ Judge, 439-440.

site, shows that slavery was indeed present at the site. In addition to the previously discussed memorial to Washington's slaves, many of the employees of the site were descendents of former slaves and served as a visual reminder of the plantation's past. This acknowledgement of slavery, whether explicitly stated in the monument or tacitly exemplified in the persons of the black employees, did not mean that the subject was thoughtfully examined or explained, however. While slaves played a role in Dodge's description of the site, he did not critically examine the topic of slavery. In fact, the presence and the work of slaves were used to highlight the elegance of the Mount Vernon way of life. He spoke about the "exceedingly pleasurable" act of going to bed "preceded by servants bearing candles and the brass warming pan full of its hot coals," and the "royal gesture" of bathing in a tub that had been filled with water that the slaves carried from the well, heated in the kitchen, and toted to the bath.¹¹¹

In addition, just as supporters of the mammy memorial advocated for a specific vision of black citizenship, Dodge's stories about the black employees and former slaves made similar claims about the appropriate roles for African Americans. For example, in his discussion of the Mount Vernon slaves, Dodge played up the benevolent image of slavery that characterized the faithful slave monuments. He stated that the slaves "had the characteristics proverbial among negroes." The slaves, according to Dodge were "proud of having been owned by the Washington family," and "delighted in telling episodes of the hospitality, the distinguished guests entertained, the balls and parties of the neighborhood, and other gossip of the day." Having extolled these virtues however,

¹¹¹ Dodge, 65.

many of which were actually reflections on the importance of the Washington family, Dodge discussed the limitations of the former Washington slaves saying, “Anything verging upon mental calculation seemed beyond their reach.” To make his point, Dodge related an exchange with “old Warner May, the negro farmer” about how much lime to apply to the fields. According to Dodge, May’s answer was “it’s b-b-been s-s-so long sence I d-d-done put any l-l-lime on dis wo-out land I done fergit...if yer want to p-p-put it on ‘bout th-th-thick nuf to t-t-track a rabbit, one bushel to de acre w-w-would do de trick.” Dodge also found humor in slave remedies and the black concept of mortality which he described as “an elusive word which they valued but could not always capture,” as when one women proclaimed that “old Phemie’s done dead and gone. I reckon she die of jest too much mortality.”¹¹² Dodge acknowledged that the memories of these former slaves were valuable in planning a faithful restoration and interpretation of the plantation. However his casual ridicule of the former slaves and their descendents made serious claims about the fitness of African Americans for citizenship.

Similarly, in the early interpretations at Mount Vernon, the 1929 monument to Washington’s slaves was untended and apparently not interesting enough to be included in the *Handbook*. The official minutes of the Association clarified the MVLA’s decision to place the tablet: “The graveyard which was used by General Washington for his slaves is unmarked. In the course of time, it is possible all traces of the graves will disappear.”¹¹³ These minutes indicate that the decision to place this marker was

¹¹² Dodge, 62 - 63.

¹¹³ “Report of the Tomb Committee,” Minutes of the MVLA Vol. VII, 1925-2, Minutes of the Council, 1928, Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association Archives, Mount Vernon, Virginia

motivated by the strong preservation ethic of the members to “religiously guard” the mansion and grounds and not from any desire to interpret this aspect of Mt. Vernon’s history to guests. In fact, until recently this marker has been overgrown and inaccessible.¹¹⁴

The fate of this grave is emblematic of the treatment of slavery in museums before 1945. During this period, the presence of slavery at the homes of the nation’s patriots was not embarrassing, controversial, or even interesting. It was, in short, unremarkable. Instead, in an era before social history, Mount Vernon, like most historic house museums, was driven by the contradictory objectives to both enshrine their subjects and authentically preserve history. By grounding their definition of authenticity in objects and not meaning however, these sites actually presented a view of American history that was more concerned with contemporary views of war, immigration, and racial equality and less concerned with a faithful narrative of their site’s past. This trend would continue into the late-twentieth century but as the American social and cultural context changed, so did the interpretations at museums.

¹¹⁴ James C. Rees, “Looking Back, Moving Forward: the Changing Interpretation of Slave Life on the Mount Vernon Estate” in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington* ed. Philip J. Schwarz (Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, 2001), 159.

CHAPTER 2

“My Gawd they’ve sold the town:”¹ Expanding Historic Representation in Colonial Williamsburg and Philipsburg Manor

Even as the Daughters of the Confederacy, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, and others were focusing on creating patriotic meccas at the homes of some of the nation’s most illustrious citizens, other forces were expanding historical inquiry and pushing museum interpretation beyond the stories of the elite. In this democratization of tradition, these forces created what historian Michael Kammen has described as “a historically based public culture for the nation as a whole and for most of its regional and ethnic components as well.”² In sites such as Colonial Williamsburg and New York’s Philipsburg Manor, the subjects of this chapter, museum administrators sought to preserve entire towns to create a more complete, in their minds, vision of the American past.

This new inclusiveness was a natural outgrowth of the work that was done in existing museums where the collections of artifacts were at the heart of the historical narrative that was presented. Even those who could not visit these patriotic shrines were exposed to representations of colonial America in popular books, artwork, and press coverage of museums like Mount Vernon. Academic history, with its belief in the inherent truth and transparency of historic artifacts, buoyed an appreciation of the colonial aesthetic and its associations with a noble American past.

¹ This quote is from a poem written by a local Williamsburg resident upon hearing Rockefeller’s plans. More of the poem can be found in George Humphrey Yetter, *Williamsburg Before and After: The Rebirth of Virginia’s Colonial Capitol* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), 55.

² Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 299.

Following the example set by museums, academic historians, and popular culture, Americans began collecting all manner of historic objects in a movement that has been given the name “Colonial Revival.”³ What began with wealthy Americans collecting items associated with other elite individuals grew into a “national pastime” that was represented by a monthly magazine that appeared in 1925 entitled *The Americana Collector*.⁴ Reflecting on this craze, Connecticut artist Wallace Nutting stated, “The vogue for antiques...became so strong a trend that every family of any pretension to have a proper home, began to collect in a large or small way.”⁵ For these collectors, the accumulation of historic objects in their own homes symbolized the same values that they had in the early interpretations at Mount Vernon: patriotism and nostalgia for a simpler past. For example, one anonymous collector wrote to the *Saturday Evening Post* to proclaim his love of the “solid, simple, dignified and lovingly wrought craftsmanship of a hundred years ago” that helped him to satisfy his “selfish desire to keep my house in period, to have genuine details instead of imitations.”⁶ In an open letter to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the editors of *The Americana Collector* exhorted him to create a Rockefeller Foundation of Bibliographical and Historical Research because “our heritage from the heroic past must be preserved as continued guidance and inspiration to ourselves

³ The colonial revival movement, according to Michael Kammen, began as early as the 1870s but “an unabashed and pervasive craze for colonial furniture, silver, various other artifacts, and entire homes did not really begin until the early 1890s.” The movement extended through the 1930s. See Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 148.

⁴ Esther Singleton, “American Antiques: Good and Bad,” *Saturday Evening Post* 198 (Jan. 9, 1926): 30-31, 177, quoted in Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 324; Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 311;

⁵ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 151.

⁶ Anonymous, “The Junk Snupper,” *Saturday Evening Post* 196 (April 19, 1924): 25, 150, 153, quoted in Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 323.

and to all mankind.”⁷ In this fervor of collecting, even commonplace historical items were thought of as relics in the American civil religion and *The Americana Collector* referred to the collection of Americana as “a creed.”⁸ For those who were unable to collect authentic antique homes, furnishings, or other ephemera, an industry of manufacturers offered reproduction objects. These items ran the gamut from reproductions that were so convincing that fraudulent sellers would claim they were antiques to items from a company that applied “the Colonial style to articles of furniture not in use in Colonial times.”⁹

In the 1920s and 1930s, therefore, museums, academic history, and popular culture were in conversation with one another. Just as museums had imbued objects at their sites with the ability to impart values such as patriotism and an understanding of American heritage and history, so did individuals who began collecting all manner of American antiques. The sheer number of collectors dictated that the definition of historic relics would expand beyond the items of the elites to include historic objects associated with everyday persons and even objects that merely looked historic.

Ironically, while average Americans had banded together to preserve the homes of the nation’s greatest heroes, it was some of the country’s most elite citizens who worked to preserve the history of everyday America in museums. Both Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. were at the vanguard of the movement to expand representation in the

⁷ “An Open Letter to John D. Rockefeller, Jr.,” *The Americana Collector* 2 (June 1926): 323-324, quoted in Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 322.

⁸ “Americana,” *The Americana Collector: A Monthly Magazine for Americana-Lore and Bibliography* I (October, 1925): 3, quoted in Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 311.

⁹ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 148; Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture 1876-1986* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 177, 179, quoted in Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 149.

nation's museums. Whether Ford and Rockefeller were cognizant of the democratizing functions of their philanthropy, however, is debatable. In many ways, sites such as Colonial Williamsburg and Henry Ford's Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, which featured an eclectic array of structures from several different time periods, were simply large, elaborate examples of the collections that Americans were amassing all over the country. The expansion of the American collecting aesthetic to include those items not associated with the elite was visible in these museums. Henry Ford, more than any other museum founder, embraced the idea of representing the common man in his Greenfield Village, which celebrated artisans and laborers and eschewed the history of the upper classes. Of course, this is not to say that Ford's museum offered a gritty depiction of American life. In fact, historian Mike Wallace has characterized its early interpretation as "life had been better in the old days and it had been getting better ever since."¹⁰ On the other hand, John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s interpretive expansion at Colonial Williamsburg was a by-product of his desire to "restore a complete area entirely free from alien or inharmonious surroundings as well as to preserve the beauty and charm of the old buildings and gardens and its historic significance."¹¹ In restoring an entire town, Rockefeller naturally recreated a greater diversity of inhabitants than were seen in single historic house museums.

The idea for Colonial Williamsburg was not Rockefeller's, however. The Reverend Dr. William Archer Rutherford Goodwin devised the plan in the early 1920s.

¹⁰ Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 12.

¹¹ John D. Rockefeller, quoted in Yetter, 54-55.

Goodwin was struck by the rich history and charm of the city. Founded in 1633 as Middle Plantation, Williamsburg is the home of The College of William and Mary, the nation's second oldest university and became the colonial capitol of Virginia in 1699. In this role, Williamsburg hosted numerous Virginia patriots such as Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson as they debated American independence. By the 1920s however, Goodwin observed that while the city had escaped some of the effects of urban sprawl, it would soon be ruined by the expansion of roads and modern conveniences. He set out to find a benefactor to restore the colonial village and thereby open "unparalleled vistas...into the nation's past."¹² Goodwin approached several wealthy industrialists, including members of the Ford family, to whom Goodwin remarked "you...are at present the chief contributors to the destruction of this city...garages and gas tanks are fast spoiling the whole appearance of the old streets and the old city, and most of the cars which stop at the garages and gas tanks are Ford cars."¹³ Not surprisingly, Goodwin's accusatory appeal was met with a terse negative response from the Ford Company. Goodwin took a different approach in his appeal to Rockefeller. Instead of blaming the oil magnate for the town's destruction, he presented him with a definite plan for the restoration and a vision of how the completed project may look. This appeal to Rockefeller struck home, and Rockefeller gave the project his full support, providing the restoration encompassed the entire city and not isolated buildings or areas.¹⁴ Upon hearing the news, one Williamsburg resident wrote:

¹² W.A.R. Goodwin, quoted in Yetter, 51.

¹³ W.A.R. Goodwin, quoted in Yetter, 51-52.

¹⁴ More complete explanations of the process by which Rockefeller and Goodwin bought Williamsburg properties and planned the restoration can be found in Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg*

*My gawd they've sold the town,
My gawd they've sold the town.
And it is said the news is spread
For many miles around.*

*The've sold the courthouse green,
I dare say all the people,
They'll sell the church, the vestry too
And even sell the steeple...*

*The streets will all come up
And the poles will all come down,
So take it from me stranger,
It's going to be some town.¹⁵*

Though the preservation of Colonial Williamsburg was an unprecedented undertaking, the innovative project used the language of earlier restorations to justify its existence. Early press about the restoration invoked the language of civil religion and played upon the city's glorious past as the colonial capitol. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation described its mission in 1931 as supplying "a shrine where great events in early American history and the lives of many of the men who made it may be visualized in their proper setting."¹⁶ A 1928 article termed the restoration "a shrine erected to the memory of our colonial forbears." This same article proceeded to clearly articulate the site's connections with the American Revolution and founding fathers describing, "The little town of Williamsburg, Va. – where the Bill of Rights was written which was

(Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2002), Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), and Yetter, *Williamsburg Before and After*. Rockefeller initially went under the pseudonym "David's Father" in his correspondence with Goodwin about purchasing different Williamsburg properties. Rockefeller was afraid that if his true identity was revealed, it would artificially inflate property values. It was not until June, 1928 (3 years after his initial purchase of the Ludwell-Paradise house), that Rockefeller's true identity was revealed.

¹⁵ Yetter, 55.

¹⁶ *The Williamsburg Restoration* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, 1931), 10, quoted in Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 2002), 32.

incorporated into the Constitution; where the Declaration of Independence received its inception in a resolution adopted by the House of Burgesses; where George Washington and Lafayette planned the battle of Yorktown, and where Patrick Henry delivered his history making oration.”¹⁷ Anxiety over the recent influx of immigrants that had played a role in the interpretations at sites like Mount Vernon was visible in the early press of Williamsburg. *The Virginia Gazette* argued that the site would be “the most attractive place in America for those who love old traditions and are proud of their Anglo-Saxon lineage and of the men and women who made America what it is today.”¹⁸ The restoration of Colonial Williamsburg began as the initial interpretations at sites like Monticello and the Lee Mansion were prepared. Therefore, while Williamsburg was moving forward by expanding the preservation movement’s focus beyond the homes of the founding fathers, its credibility as a site worth restoring and preserving was still grounded in its association with a glorious colonial past. Connections with colonial and Revolutionary history had proved profitable for other museums and Rockefeller invested time and money in the hopes of building on this success. By the end of the initial era of restoration at Colonial Williamsburg, Rockefeller had spent \$79 million on the project. 720 buildings that were constructed after the cutoff date of 1790 had been demolished or moved, the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad had been rerouted, and hundreds of historic buildings had either been restored or reproduced.

¹⁷ Harry Hites, “Town Goes Backward to Progress,” *The Washington Post*, 1 July 1928, SM1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1991).

¹⁸ *Virginia Gazette*, 28 November 1930, quoted in Yetter, 25.

Within a decade of beginning work on Colonial Williamsburg, Rockefeller took on another historic project, Philipsburg Manor in Tarrytown, New York. This undertaking was more modest, as the site of Philipsburg is the 25 acres that remain of a 52,000 acre plot of land controlled by the Philipse family from the 1680s through the American Revolution. As with Colonial Williamsburg, the history of Philipsburg touches on many themes in American history. Unlike Williamsburg, however, Philipsburg Manor is not connected with any famous American or Revolutionary heroes. The family's patriarch, Frederick Philipse, emigrated from the Netherlands as a master carpenter with the Dutch West India Company. Philipse and his wife, wealthy widow and astute businesswoman Margaret Hardenbroeck, were actively involved in the fur trade, slave trade and the international wheat trade. When Frederick Philipse died in 1702, Philipsburg Manor and the business enterprise were left to their son, Adolph. During Adolph's tenure as lord of the manor, Philipsburg was in its heyday. Following the pattern begun by his father, Adolph leased a majority of the New York land controlled by the Philipse family to farmers from northern and western Europe. Enslaved Africans worked on the Philipses' privately controlled 750 acre plot of land, in the mill, and in the family's manor house. Adolph's death in 1750 left his nephew Frederick II in charge of the manor. Frederick II was firmly ensconced in New York City's gentry society and his interest in rural Philipsburg was peripheral at best, especially since the locus of wheat production had moved outside Westchester County. Frederick II sold major tracts of land (in large part to the tenant farm families that had been working them for generations) and a portion of the slave population at Philipsburg before his death in approximately 1752.

The land then moved into the hands of Frederick III. He held control of the manor during the American Revolution. Betting on the success of the British, Frederick III remained loyal and fled to England after the Revolution to avoid prosecution by the new American government. Frederick III's property throughout the country was seized by the government and sold at public auction.

After the Philipses lost control of Philipsburg Manor, the land passed through many hands, including New York's prominent Beekman family and silent movie star Elsie Janis. It was the latter owner who was in control of the house and property when plans to sell the historic Philipse Castle and subdivide the land into housing developments became public. Local residents as well as the Tarrytown Historical Society became alarmed at the possibility that the landmark would be destroyed. In the pleas to save Philipsburg Manor, the example of Mount Vernon was replaced by Colonial Williamsburg. Tarrytown Historical Society Director Hugh Grant Rowell was in charge of the restoration. He stated in a speech made to the local Kiwanis Club that "Tarrytown represents the true northern picture of early settlement as Williamsburg, the South. Its story is not only parallel but supplementary in its historical significance." As was the case with earlier efforts, the preservation of Philipsburg was portrayed as a supreme act of patriotism. In fact, the local D.A.R. became involved in the effort to save Philipsburg exhorting, "Wake up all ye patriotic groups of the county...let us make the most of this superb opportunity."¹⁹

¹⁹ "Community Effort to Save Manor House Urged by Rowell," *Tarrytown Daily News*, 12 January 1939, p1, 1046:117, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC; "The Women's Forum: Elsie Janis' Decision Can Be of Significance Only if Her Intentions are Carried Out," *Tarrytown Daily News*, 10 July 1936, p1, 1046:117, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC;

By April of 1936, these efforts culminated in a formal request to local resident John D. Rockefeller Jr., to aid in the project. Rowell appealed to Rockefeller's regional loyalty and his sense of duty from his work at Williamsburg. Rowell stated, "The Tarrytowns are recognized as being one of half a dozen communities in this country with a really significant contribution to American history over a long period...the Tarrytowns, with the story of the North are just as rich in lore [as the restored Williamsburg and St. Augustine], and in my opinion, have a richer historic background...and no Northern restoration has been attempted." He ended his editorial with a plea that "our good neighbor and famous preserver of worth-while historic shrines will turn his eyes 'homeward' and come to our aid."²⁰ While Rowell's public request was initially met with resistance from Rockefeller, he decided to lend his support to the project. Rockefeller's contributions grew as the financial demands of the restoration mounted.

Restoring a Community

Having purchased and committed to restore Williamsburg and Philipsburg, Rockefeller and his crew set to work. The concerns that guided the early phases of the restoration of Williamsburg and Philipsburg in the 1930s and 1940s mirrored the preoccupations that consumed the interpretations at sites such as Monticello and Mount Vernon at this time. In completing the Williamsburg restoration, Rockefeller was concerned with the authenticity of the project and he hired the nation's most prominent architects and architectural historians to complete it. Goodwin further instructed them to complete all of the work with "*fidelity to an ideal, rather than fidelity to a time*

²⁰ "Rowell Appeals to Rockefeller to Save Philipse Manor House; Opposes Local Drive for Funds April 6, 1939" p2, 1046:117, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

schedule.”²¹ The restoration team used old photographs, sketches, and drawings to discern the architectural and design features of the original colonial exteriors. A 1782 source entitled, “The Frenchmen’s Map,” for example, was particularly helpful. Created to plan the billeting of French soldiers in the town, the map gave the layout of the entire village. Furthermore, to recreate the historic Governor’s Mansion, which had burned in a fire during the American Revolution, the architects found an English plate that depicted the building. As architect Thomas Mott Shaw later recalled, “Nothing was ever done without a good reason. If there were no documented reasons for doing a particular thing, we didn’t do it.” This vigilance was sometimes underestimated by local residents including the president of William and Mary, who requested that the windows in the historic Wren building be dropped down to admit more light. When Shaw explained, “There’s an old daguerreotype of this building...you can actually count the brick courses and you can see just where the old windows were, and to us that’s a valuable document,” the president replied, “Well, Mr. Shaw, what are a few brick courses between friends?”²² In the atmosphere of the Colonial Williamsburg restoration, a few brick courses were immeasurably important. In fact, when it was revealed that a building, presumably one less important than the impressive Wren building, was rebuilt six feet off from its original foundations, Rockefeller had it moved, stating, “No scholar must ever be able to come and say we have made a mistake.”²³

²¹ W.A.R. Goodwin, “Report and Recommendations,” 4 February 1929, RG 3.2E, box 155, Folder 1354, RFA, quoted in Greenspan, 27, emphasis in original.

²² Thomas Mott Shaw, quoted in Yetter, 61.

²³ Rockefeller is quoted in numerous sources including Philip Kopper, *Colonial Williamsburg* (New York:Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 228 and Michael Wallace, “Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States,” *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, eds. Susan P. Benson, Stephen

Rockefeller's obsession with the physical accuracy of the Williamsburg restoration guided the initial interpretation of the site. For more than a decade, the inspirational and patriotic possibilities of the museum that had overwhelmed newspaper reporters took a back seat to descriptions of the process and product of the restoration. This fact was largely due to the biases held by Rockefeller himself, who viewed the educational possibilities of the site as secondary to the material reproduction of the eighteenth-century village. Even as late as 1945, Rockefeller held this view: "It has always been my feeling, and still is, that this [education] is an aspect of the work which, because of its great importance and possibilities and also because of its far lesser cost, could and would be taken up by later generations and financed...from the project itself...Naturally, therefore, I have felt right along, and continue to feel, that until the physical restoration has been completed, neither surplus capital nor even surplus income or earnings should be used for that purpose lest the larger project might fail of completion."²⁴ Because of Rockefeller's unwillingness to fund historical research and comprehensive interpretive programs, these aspects of the site did not materialize until much later. Instead, for the first decade of Williamsburg's existence as a historical destination, it offered very little in the way of programming. Tourists simply walked

Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 147. I found this quote in Handler and Gable, 34. Apparently, the weight of historical evidence was sometimes ignored during the restoration process if it conflicted with the architects' contemporary understandings of colonial architecture and design. In his article entitled, "Beaux Arts Ideals and Colonial Reality: The Reconstruction of Williamsburg's Capitol, 1928-1934," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 49, No. 4 (December, 1990): 373-389, Carl Lounsbury argues that Beaux Arts principles led to a critical misinterpretation of historical evidence in the recreation of the capitol building. Because of these misinterpretations, the building reflects the cultural aesthetic of the 1920s and 1930s more than it does the colonial era.

²⁴ JDR, Jr. to Kenneth Chorley, November 27, 1945, RAC, quoted in Rex Marshall Ellis, "Presenting the Past: Education, interpretation and the teaching of black history at Colonial Williamsburg" (Ph.D. Diss.: The College of William and Mary, 1990), 71.

through the streets of the recreated town and took scheduled tours of the exhibition buildings. These tours were led by “hostesses” – a term that Rockefeller chose to mask their educational responsibilities. The hostesses were primarily charged with relaying the physical attributes of the restoration to the visiting public. Rutherford Goodwin, the son of Williamsburg’s savior W.A.R. Goodwin, was originally in charge of training the hostesses. He composed a poem in 1935 that is illustrative of both the interpretive programming at Williamsburg and the general aggravations of being a hostess.

This lovely Governor’s Palace,
I feel that you should know,
Was built by Henry Cary first
Two Hundred years ago.
The governors here resided then...
The King? He stayed at home...
Now, follow with your party, please;
One’s not allowed to roam---
As I said, the floor is marble...
That chair – It’s Chippendale
No, I never read his book...
That is a hand wrought nail...

Yes sir, the rug is tapestry---
(Oh Lord, perhaps I lied)
Please little girl, don’t handle that...
No, Ma’am the paint is new
(I’ll have to choke that woman yet
Before this group is through)
Venetian Blinds are of that day...
Or, so the record said...
You must await the second floor
To see the old oak bed...²⁵

The hostesses also introduced tourists to the restoration’s guiding philosophy of creating historical understanding via the physical environment by introducing them “to the great

²⁵ Rutherford Goodwin, quoted in Ellis 26-28.

ghosts of those who built this place, and from it reached out to aid so greatly in the building of a nation.”²⁶ Tourists were to emerge from their vacation with an understanding that the Williamsburg restoration was created in order to increase understanding of the American past and its meaning for the present day. Without any actual historical information, however, visitors must have learned less about colonial history than they did about the more recent history of the restoration. Seemingly, the more important function of the hostesses was to create an atmosphere of southern charm and elegance and a hostess’s pedagogical capability took a backseat to her charm and grace. As former hostess Alberta Sneed remembered, “It wasn’t like any other place that you went to that had a guide to take you through with a cut-and-dried statement of this, that, and the other. They talked to you as if you were going through their homes, and that’s what we were told to do.”²⁷

In 1936, Williamsburg’s administrators added craft shops to the interpretive program at the site so that tourists “might see how colonists in Virginia during the eighteenth century made many of the articles with which they lived.”²⁸ By 1937, several of these shops had opened, including cabinetmakers, blacksmiths, and silversmiths. This number grew when a candlemaker’s, spinner’s, weaver’s, cobbler’s, and barber shop opened within two years. The Williamsburg administrators were careful to point out that the decision to offer craft demonstrations was done with the same attention to authenticity that guided the rest of the restoration. As one article commented, “The

²⁶ Kenneth Chorley, “The Williamsburg Restoration – Its Purpose and Objectives,” 15 December 1934, Hostess Training 1934, General Correspondence Records, CWFA, quoted in Greenspan, 47.

²⁷ Ellis, 30.

²⁸ “Williamsburg Plans Handicrafts Revival,” *New York Times*, 1 November 1936, N7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers the New York Times (1851-2001).

Department of Research of the Restoration has been conducting an extensive study of the life and habits of the people of the period. This research, it was said, has established the importance of the handicraft industries in Williamsburg during the eighteenth century and revealed the methods and customs of the craftsmen.”²⁹ Without a corps of trained craftspeople, Colonial Williamsburg hired outside artisans, whose wares were available for purchase, to run the shops. Conflicts between the craftsmen and visitors were soon evident. The craftsmen were not trained educators and many were unable or unwilling to interact with visitors. In addition, because they were making items that were available for sale, the craftsmen saw production and not interpretation as their primary function. After all, any time spent with visitors cut into their profits.³⁰ Despite their shortcomings, these hostess-led tours of the restoration and craft demonstrations remained at the heart of the Williamsburg interpretive scheme for the first decade of the restored town’s existence as a tourist destination.

The priorities of Williamsburg influenced the restoration of Philipsburg. From the very start of the project, Rockefeller and Rowell believed that complete authenticity was achievable. Rowell wrote in 1940 that “we are now in a position to obtain what I agree with you is an important objective ‘a satisfactory result that shall be beyond criticism.’”³¹ In addition, the discovery of a 1750 probate inventory that listed every item in the Manor House provided “a meticulous and exact picture of the original castle”

²⁹ Ibid, N7.

³⁰ Ellis, 128.

³¹ “Letter from Hugh Grant Rowell to JDR Jr.” 5/21/1940, p3, 117:1048, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

and “authenticated” the restoration.³² In fact, the attention to authenticity at Philipsburg was going to provide a model for other museums to follow:

The careful records of all types kept by the Philipse Castle Restorations should *{sic}* result not only in valuable historical outcomes but also should be developed as a practical guide in all phases...for those who plan to undertake REAL restoration work as compared with so-called restoration work which consists either of making old houses liveable in an early but not wholly accurate atmosphere or else consists of restorations where complete accuracy of detail is not expected or sought though possibly desired.³³

For a time, the Philipsburg interpretation was used as an example for other restorations to follow. In 1943, the editors of the *Journal of the American Society of Architectural Historians* asked Rowell to complete an article to, as Rowell described, “Discuss very frankly our experiences at the Restoration, with the hope that it can, by being open-eyed, critical, objective, and impersonal – a sharing and a warning – help those who will be charged with the numerous preservation projects that seem imminent in the postwar period.” Predictably, Rowell’s article focused on how to achieve and maintain complete authenticity in architectural restorations. In addition to the familiar warnings about having to “sacrifice persons, things, or ideas that fail to evoke truth,” however, Rowell’s article included advice that signaled a new goal for the Rockefeller museums. He stated, “There must be added the life and living of the time and place, so realistically repeated

³² “Old Mill from Fishkill for Philipse Manor” *North Tarrytown NY Sentinel*, 31 August 1940, p1, 118:1049, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

³³ “Proposals for Postwar Projects in Connection with the Completion of the Philipse Castle Restoration and Other Activities of the Historical Society of the Tarrytowns, Inc.” 17 January 1943, p5, 117:1040, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

that the visitor is actually carried back, visually and mentally, in complete abandonment of the present to the era selected. Literally the clock is turned backward.”³⁴

Interest in the “life and living” of the site was a goal at Philipsburg Manor from its inception. Its appearance at Colonial Williamsburg, however, signaled a dramatic departure from the previous restoration-focused interpretation. As Rutherford Goodwin, who was initially charged with the task of historic interpretation, put it, “Say what we will, the public, the press, the Board, the staff, and the citizens of Williamsburg have for the past twelve years been *restoration minded*. Habit is hard to overcome. We are now entering more intensively into the problem of historical emphasis.”³⁵ To effect this change of habit, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation President Kenneth Chorley formed the Colonial Williamsburg Planning Committee and hired outside consulting firms to submit reports on how to enhance the visitor experience at Colonial Williamsburg. One of these firms spoke pointedly about the need for an interpretive change at Colonial Williamsburg:

Our enjoyment was clouded by only one reservation: we felt that an even more exciting experience was barely eluding us; we felt that we were in the midst of a magnificent stage setting but that the drama had not yet begun. And there was a faint feeling of annoyance that our attention was being continually redirected to the set when our thoughts were on the play for which it was intended...thus Williamsburg is performing a valuable service in guiding American taste, and even in helping to develop a distinctive American style of domestic art...But we believe that the reconstruction was not intended primarily to satisfy the archeological student or the home builder, and we believe that even these classes of visitors will be grateful if they also derive from the city a deeper emotional experience...we recommend a shift of emphasis in its [the Restorations’] presentation; we recommend that emphasis be shifted from the restoration of

³⁴ Hugh Grant Rowell, “The Philipse Castle Restoration and Its Lessons,” *The Journal of the American Society of Architectural Historians* 3, No. 4 (Oct., 1943): 8-9.

³⁵ T.R. Goodwin to Chorley, Jan. 25, 1940 in Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age*, 62.

Williamsburg to the values which made Williamsburg so greatly worth restoring.³⁶

Reflecting on his experience at Colonial Williamsburg, Rockefeller wrote about how his initial interest in complete authenticity expanded to include these educational functions. In doing so, he delineated the values that he felt the restoration invoked saying, “The restoration of Williamsburg... offered an opportunity to restore a complete area entirely free from alien or inharmonious surroundings as well as to preserve the beauty and charm of the old buildings and gardens of the city and its historic significance. Thus it made a unique and irresistible appeal. As the work progressed, I have come to feel that perhaps an even greater value is the lesson that it teaches of the patriotism, high purpose, and unselfish devotion of our forefathers to the common good.”³⁷ With the stage in both Williamsburg and Philipsburg finally set so that “no scholar [will] be able to come and say we have made a mistake,” Rockefeller believed that the entire museum and its educational message would be unassailable.³⁸ In the 1940s, both Colonial Williamsburg and Philipsburg Manor developed pedagogical goals that were achieved through their interpretations.

The Contemporary Uses of History

Emerging as they did in the 1940s, these interpretations at Colonial Williamsburg and Philipsburg Manor were grounded in that decade’s preoccupations: vivid memories

³⁶ Walter Teague and Robert Harper, “A Report to Williamsburg Restoration, Inc.,” 24 November 1948, RAC, 5, quoted in Ellis, 80.

³⁷ JDR, Jr., quoted in Yetter, 55.

³⁸ Rockefeller is quoted in numerous sources including Philip Kopper, *Colonial Williamsburg* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 228 and Michael Wallace, “Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States,” *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, ed. Susan P. Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 147. I found this quote in Handler and Gable, 34.

of the Great Depression, U.S. involvement in the Second World War, and fear of the growing influence of communism, fascism, and socialism. The museums were not unique in crafting their individual histories to address global concerns. Cold War concerns even guided the practices of some members of the academic community. Historian Louis Gottschalk considered “the question of relative locations and the atom bomb” when considering a job offer that would move him from Chicago to Washington. In their scholarship, historians tried to juggle a commitment to historical objectivity with the urge to use history to teach “citizenship.” One historian noted that “intellectual freedom and pursuit of truth” were at the center of the American system that historians needed to defend but warned, “Men are seeking both direction and the reassurance of religious or ideological faith. They will not be content with cold treatises.” The American Historical Association’s President was the most explicit in his mustering of historians: “Total war, whether it be hot or cold, enlists everyone and calls upon everyone to assume his part. The historian is no freer from this obligation than the physicist.”³⁹

While such language was often met with lukewarm response from practicing historians, it guided many Americans’ views of history. The connections between the modern geopolitical climate and museum interpretation were clearly expressed in Philipsburg Manor’s initial interpretation which painted the history of the Philipse family as an example of American ingenuity, economic success, and culture. Philipse Castle Director Hugh Grant Rowell made this fact explicit: “In the pioneer industrial

³⁹ W. Stull Holt to Samuel Flagg Bemis, 6 December 1947, Bemis Papers, 1946, quoted in Novick, 315; Garrett Mattingly, “A Sample Discipline,” 6, quoted in Novick, 315; Herring, “A Political Scientist Considers the Question,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 72 (1948): 124, 123, 127, 129, quoted in Novick, 317; “Social Responsibilities of the Historian,” 282-284, quoted in Novick, 318.

settlement,...set in the forest glades of the Manor of Phillipsburgh, the sturdy, thrifty Dutch (even under the British Crown) lived well, yet frugally, nobly, yet conservatively, and in an atmosphere possibly even more cosmopolitan than that of their southern contemporaries. (Actually the Castle is slightly earlier than any Williamsburg structure.)”⁴⁰ While Rowell’s statement betrays some rivalry between Philipsburg and its older sibling to the south, it also clearly delineates Philipsburg’s initial interpretive goals.

Historic sketches used to create the interpretation at Philipsburg Manor linked the Philipsees to major themes in American history. The administrators invoked the nation’s pioneer spirit by noting that Westchester County was the frontier in 1680 and Rowell suggested that an interpretive mistake would be “in departing from the forest primeval and the pioneer touch.”⁴¹ In particular, however, Frederick Philipse was linked to ideas of American ingenuity: “A penniless artisan, his native shrewdness and energy enabled him to become very shortly one of the most influential men in the young colony and probably its wealthiest citizen.”⁴² A second document was even more forceful in linking the seventeenth-century Dutch immigrant with the cultural preoccupations of the 1930s: “He was one of the first of what today we like to call ‘Americans,’ and his story reads along the ‘rags to riches’ theme...His rapid rise in the new world to become one of the most prominent and prosperous traders of New Amsterdam is evidence of brains and

⁴⁰ Hugh Grant Rowell, “The Philipse Castle Restoration and Its Lessons,” *The Journal of the American Society of Architectural Historians* 3 no. 4 (Oct., 1943): 9, all emphasis in original.

⁴¹ “Letter from Hugh Grant Rowell to JDR Jr.” 21 May 1940, p3, 117:1048, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC;

⁴² “Historical Sketch of the Original Manor House of Frederic Philipse at North Tarrytown, NY” p1, 1046:117, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

ambition.”⁴³ In celebrating Philipse’s economic success, the narratives were also celebrating the opportunities that the American economic system afforded its citizens. This was of particular importance during the 1930s and 1940s when socialism and communism were gaining international ground. In addition to celebrating the American spirit and economy, the Depression-era documents paid homage to the Philipses’ shrewdness. They noted that Philipsbug Manor was purchased for the bargain price of “a few pounds of tobacco, some cloth and hardware, and a little rum.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, Margaret Philipse was portrayed as the ultimate penny-pincher and “her thrift was such that she once risked the lives of a group of her sailors whom she sent out in a small boat in a heavy sea to rescue a mop that had fallen overboard.”⁴⁵

In spite of their ingenuity and thrift, the distinctly American history of the Philipses was complicated by Frederick III’s decision to remain loyal to Britain during the American Revolution. The documents acknowledged that Frederick III was “the head and front of the conservatives in Westchester during the events leading up to the Revolution.” This glitch in the historical record was easily reconciled by the narrative: “His leadership, however, seems more due to his wealth and position than to any intrinsic qualities, and although he headed the list of suspects presented by the county rebels to the provincial Congress, he took no apparent active steps against the rebels, merely lent his support to the English. In the Summer of 1778 he was suspected of having communication with British ships lying in the Hudson River, and was exiled to

⁴³ “Historical Tarrytown and North Tarrytown,” p25, 1046:117, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

⁴⁴ “Historical Sketch of the Original Manor House of Frederic Philipse at North Tarrytown, NY” p1, RFA, RAC.

⁴⁵ “Historical Tarrytown and North Tarrytown,” p25, RFA, RAC.

Connecticut.”⁴⁶ In an attempt to “fit” the history into the interests of contemporary culture, Frederick III’s past was re-remembered. His extensive interaction with loyal forces is evident from this quote but was disregarded as mere support. Furthermore, in order to minimize his betrayal of American ideals, the patriots (as they surely would have been called by most histories of the era) were referred to as rebels.

In addition to a preoccupation with larger American ideals, the first interpretation of Philipsburg was regionally oriented. In Westchester County, New York, this regional identity was created by attention to Dutch heritage. The 1945 slogan for the site read: “An Inimitable Patriotic Shrine, Recapitulating for Today and Tomorrow, The Unforgettable Story of the Contribution of the Sturdy Dutch Stock To The Americas.”⁴⁷ This slogan is emblematic of an increased interest in European heritage after U.S. entry into World War II. Because many Americans felt that the war had been fought to save European civilization, celebrations of a hyphenated Americanism became increasingly popular in the years following the war. The Finnish-American Society, for example, was founded in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1943 to “encourage and try to keep alive some of the worthwhile customs and traditions peculiar to the Finns.”⁴⁸ This attention to Dutch heritage is just one of the ways in which the Philipsburg celebration of the past was a justification of the present, whether it be the present economy, culture, or sacrifice in World War II.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 25.

⁴⁷ “Letter from Alice Runyon to J.D.R. Jr.” 1/19/1945, p1, 117:1039, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

⁴⁸ Matthew Lahti to Arthur J. Larsen, Mar. 17, 1947, Minnesota Territorial Centennial, St. Paul Papers (BX7), MinnHS, quoted in Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 542.

The museum opened appropriately on Independence Day, July 4, 1943. The physical site of this first interpretation was significantly different than later incarnations. The manor house included the Philipse's original building as well as the Beekmans' 1783 addition to the structure. A 1739 mill from Fishkill, New York, was reconstructed on the foundations of the original Philipse Mill but was inoperable. A smokehouse and well were similarly reconstructed according to original plans. In addition, the museum had some craft demonstrations and static displays throughout the manor house. These displays spoke to various parts of the American story. Local antique furniture and paintings were augmented by Washington Irving scenes and a Rockefeller Collection with valuable paintings. The authenticity of the first interpretation was highlighted by "Vision Panels" in the walls of the house that showed the original mortar and woodwork and thus underscored the "ingenious method by which modern engineering preserved the worn skeleton of the house."⁴⁹ Philipsburg's connection to the frontier was made explicit by a room with Indian relics and gun turrets "where the Philipse might defend themselves against possible attack from the Pocantico River."⁵⁰ It is unclear whether the Washington room, where George Washington was said to have stayed, ever came to fruition as a visible connection to the nation's greatest patriot.⁵¹

The articulation of American ideals at Philipsburg Manor was clear to its visitors. In fact, the context of the Second World War seems to have strengthened these

⁴⁹ "Philipse Castle is Dedicated," *Tarrytown Daily News*, 6 July 1943, p2, 119:1059, Cultural Interests Series, RFA, RAC. "Philipse Castle is Dedicated," Cultural Interests Series, RFA, RAC.

⁵⁰ "Philipse Castle is Dedicated," Cultural Interests Series, RFA, RAC

⁵¹ The Washington Room concept was discussed in a memo from Rowell to JDR Jr. 27 February 1940, p2, 117:1048, Cultural Interests Series, RFA, RAC.

connections.⁵² A report of the opening stated that “on the 250-year-old holdings of a pioneer who had helped make their nation strong enough to withstand a world war, the audience then rose for the ‘Star Spangled Banner.’ Unaccompanied, their sure voices reflected a fresh realization of what that nation is again fighting for.”⁵³ Letters of appreciation streamed into Rockefeller’s office in the years following the opening. These letters show that everyday visitors made the connection between the ecstatic patriotism of the Second World War and the ideals of the restoration. One woman wrote to “thank you for the thoughtfulness and generosity which have made it possible for the public to have this great privilege of reliving our American past...May there ever be Rockefellers and their like to keep this country great by constant reminders of its past greatness.”⁵⁴ John Beekman, a descendent of a family who once occupied the manor house, wrote before that opening that “you are doing a great Patriotic and educational good in this project. It fosters true American spirit, and we sorely need it at this time, with the world in confussion *{sic}* and nations in consternation and Dictators who would set themselves up with ruling powers that tend toward Paganistic and autocratic forms of Government.”⁵⁵ Beekman’s enthusiasm did not wane after the site’s opening and he penned a poem celebrating the event:

Twas a most fitting day that it
should be
The birthday of our freedom – we

⁵² Kammen notes that World War II led to increased interest in American history. See Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 533.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 2.

⁵⁴ “Letter from Dorothy Stroh Tisdale to JDR jr.” 8 November 1948, p1, 119:1058, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

⁵⁵ “Letter from John J. Beekman to JDR jr.” 8 July 1941, p1, 119:1058, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

preserve
The torch that lights a darkened
world and we
From this lofty course shall never
swerve⁵⁶

After the war ended, the correspondence reveals that people were less connected to the patriotism of the 1940s but still were strongly committed to historic preservation.

Typical of this period is a letter that thanked Rockefeller for his part in the Phillips restoration but expressed concern over the neglect of “the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery...They [visitors] wondered why such a historical site known to all school children had been so neglected...They asked me if there wasn’t some civic organization that might take care of such restorations and perpetual care.”⁵⁷

At Colonial Williamsburg the correlation between the modern era and the interpretive goals was not coincidental but, instead, was entirely by design. Consultants Raymond Rich Associates stated that “Williamsburg’s educational program should be related, in a fundamental way, to the most important current problems of the American people.”⁵⁸ This philosophy had already been codified by Colonial Williamsburg’s motto, “That the future may learn from the past.” By the mid-1940s, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation agreed that “it was the Foundation’s fundamental duty to teach principles of

⁵⁶ “A Word of Appreciation” *Tarrytown Daily News*, 7 July 1943, 119:1058, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

⁵⁷ “Letter from L. Farmer to JDR jr.” 10 September 1958, p1, 119:1058, Cultural Interests Series, Record Group 2, RFA, RAC.

⁵⁸ Raymond Rich Associates, position paper, “Colonial Williamsburg and Today,” 13 February 1941 (Colonial Williamsburg Archive, Williamsburg, VA), quoted in Cary Carson, “Colonial Williamsburg and the Practice of Interpretive Planning in American History Museums,” *The Public Historian* 20, no. 3 (Summer, 1998): 16.

liberty [and] the ideals of democratic government.”⁵⁹ In 1947, the Foundation codified this agreement with a mission statement that read:

The purpose of Colonial Williamsburg is to recreate as accurately as possible the environment of the men and women of eighteenth century Williamsburg and to impart information about their lives and times that present and future generations may have a more vivid appreciation of the contribution of these early Americans to the ideals and culture of our country.⁶⁰

This mission statement offered Director of Education and later Vice President of the Division of Interpretation, Edward Alexander the themes that would guide the Williamsburg interpretation. In addition, by focusing on “the men and women of eighteenth century Williamsburg,” the mission statement offered administrators the intellectual freedom and interpretive mandate to move beyond the “great man” focus of museums like Mount Vernon and Monticello and include the experiences of a greater variety of Williamsburgers.

Instead of opting for a wholesale reinterpretation of the historic core of the restoration, Alexander and the other Williamsburg administrators chose to focus the new history-based interpretation on school programs and special events. Among the most successful of the new programs were four themed school tours including the Everyday Life Tour, the Self-Government Tour, the American Heritage Tour, and a special tour for groups who were spending an extended period of time at Colonial Williamsburg.

Launched in 1946, the school programs served 16,801 Virginia students by the end of 1947. In addition to the school groups, Colonial Williamsburg created niche

⁵⁹ Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, *Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg: A Plan of Education* (Williamsburg, Va.: CWF), quoted in Handler and Gable, 64, n. 10.

⁶⁰ Kenneth Chorley to Rockefeller, III, 11 February 1946, RAC, quoted in Ellis, 85.

programming for garden clubs, antique collectors, and preservation students. Although it reached only a select group of academics, the 1943 creation, with the College of William and Mary, of The Institute of Early American History and Culture had a lasting effect on the study of American history.⁶¹

Administrators also hosted or partnered with outside agencies that shared the restoration's political and historical agenda. During World War II, administrators arranged for 300 service men and women to visit the restoration each day. These military personnel received an intensive tour of the site so that they could understand that the "principles which were established...at Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Yorktown in the eighteenth century are exactly the same as those we are fighting to maintain..." If Williamsburg accomplished this goal, it would be serving "a worthwhile purpose in the national emergency."⁶² In 1951, Colonial Williamsburg hosted its first Voice of Democracy Workshop. This workshop was planned alongside the Voice of Democracy contest that asked young Americans to write statements on the theme, "I speak for Democracy." One winner from each state was selected to read their statements on the Voice of America radio network, which was designed by the United States Information Agency to promote a favorable view of the United States abroad. Colonial Williamsburg's 1951 program was so successful that they continued the tradition, eventually shortening its name to the "Democracy Workshop." Colonial Williamsburg also became involved with The International Assembly, a series of seminars for

⁶¹ Ellis, 89.

⁶² "Training Program for Soldiers," 7 May 1942, RG 3.2E, Box 145, Folder 1276, RFA, quoted in Greenspan, 67.

American students who would be studying abroad and foreign students who were studying in the United States. Each year, The International Assembly invited a series of world renowned speakers such as J. William Fulbright, Edward R. Murrow, and Dean Rusk to speak on topics related to American history and culture. The thought behind the symposium was that the Assembly would instill in the next generation of leaders an understanding of the values and history of the United States.⁶³

Some of Colonial Williamsburg's plans were entirely divorced from the restoration's historic core. In an effort to "see how 'the Williamsburg story' could be carried more effectively not only to the people of this country but to those abroad," John D. Rockefeller III created a Special Survey Committee in 1949. Responding primarily to the threat of the Cold War, the Committee wanted to develop "a program which will stimulate such thinking on American heritage as will lead to constructive action on the part of our audience." In short, the committee wanted to use Colonial Williamsburg to promote democracy at home and abroad because "a strong democratic faith...alone can win this struggle."⁶⁴ The products of the committee's work were books, movies, film strips, lectures, and symposiums that, with the exception of the Colonial Williamsburg orientation film *The Story of a Patriot*, were not a part of the programming offered to the 200,000 plus annual Williamsburg tourists.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ellis, 90-93.

⁶⁴ Special Survey Committee, descriptive guide to files prepared by D. Stephen Elliott, 23 March 1973 (Colonial Williamsburg archive, Williamsburg, Va.), quoted in Carson, 23; Special Survey Committee, working notes, December 15, 1950 (Colonial Williamsburg archive, Williamsburg, VA), quoted in Carson, 23.

⁶⁵ Carson, 24.

In its first attempt at historic interpretation, therefore, Colonial Williamsburg did not rise fully to the rhetoric of its mission statement. While this new programming represented a shift in emphasis for Colonial Williamsburg, it did not affect the majority of visitors' experiences at the restoration. Despite the restoration's decision to focus on the people of Colonial Williamsburg, the hostess-led tours, the centerpiece of the average visitor's trip, remained centered on the restoration itself. Colonial Williamsburg administrators Richard K. Showman and Walter J. Heacock pointed to a lack of hostess training as the reason for the stagnant interpretive focus. Showman and Heacock found that, "Too often the beginning hostess, lacking a well-defined body of knowledge for which she is responsible, has chosen the easier, and far less satisfactory, alternative of learning from the experienced hostesses. And too often she has also fallen back on the comforting device of talking about objects in the rooms instead of the ideas, men and events which gave a particular building significance."⁶⁶

The problems of the interpretive program were underscored by a confidential memo from Arthur Goodfriend to John D. Rockefeller, III. Goodfriend was a high ranking official in the U.S. Information Agency who, at Rockefeller's request, spent several weeks evaluating the programs at the restoration in 1954. While there, Goodfriend tagged along with groups of visitors, engaged others in conversation, and even used his young daughter to elicit children's opinions.⁶⁷ While Goodfriend found that the restoration was a success "as spectacle, as beauty, as pleasure," he had

⁶⁶ R.K. Showman and W.J. Heacock to Hostesses and Escorts, 21 December 1951, quoted in Ellis, 130.

⁶⁷ Ellis, 109.

reservations about the project that were shared by the other visitors.⁶⁸ These reservations were expressed by those Goodfriend interviewed, including a mother who stated:

“Somehow I felt a lack of warmth in Williamsburg. I brought Martha here because I thought she’d come away with a deep sense of being an American, and love of the people who made America what it is. Instead, it’s ice cold. All about things and not people.”

Another mother found that “the place is so rich and clean and packed with museum pieces. Instead of making the visitor feel like a participant, he somehow is made to feel like an intruder on some rich man’s estate. Instead of being made to feel this is mine, it seems to belong to somebody else.” In reference to the hostesses, one visitor proclaimed, “You can’t drag a word about Jefferson or Washington out of them. All they want to tell you is if the place is reconstructed or restored, and how special all the furnishings are. They show you a bed, but they don’t say who slept in it. They show you a table, but they won’t say who ate on it. They manage to dehumanize the place completely. Too bad, because if once in a while you could capture a feeling for the great Americans who lived here, Williamsburg would do a lot of good.”⁶⁹ Goodfriend summarized the potentials of the restoration and its shortcomings:

Williamsburg, to fulfill its interpretive function, needs someone in its inner counsels, who speaks for *people* – the people of the past, the people of today. He must know the living as well as the dead. He must spend much of his time among the people, here and all over the land...He must know their educational limitations – those who know no history, those who are studying history, those who once knew history, perhaps, but have forgotten. If he listens well, and evaluates shrewdly, and reports honestly – Williamsburg will become part of the people – not a relic of a distant past, but warm, alive, strong and sentient.

⁶⁸ Arthur Goodfriend to John D. Rockefeller, 3rd, confidential letter, 9 March 1954, Colonial Williamsburg archive, Williamsburg, VA, quoted in Carson, 25.

⁶⁹ Arthur Goodfriend to John D. Rockefeller, III, 9 March 1954, Rockefeller Archives Center, quoted in Ellis, 111-113.

Williamsburg can give the people inspiration only to the degree that Williamsburg, and all it is and does, is inspired by the people, and responds to their felt and unfelt need.⁷⁰

Goodfriend's report found that at least a portion of the American people had moved on from the object-focused interpretations that had guided not only the Colonial Williamsburg restoration but also museums like Mount Vernon and Monticello. The disdain for "museum pieces" from a "rich man's estate" and the desire to connect with the people of Williamsburg signaled a concern about the common American people that would be given a voice in academia by the new social historians. This concern would also lead to new innovations at museums like Colonial Williamsburg and Philipsburg Manor.

African Americans at Colonial Williamsburg and Philipsburg Manor

The questions that guided these early interpretations surrounded whose history was going to be represented at the historic sites and what message visitors would glean from their visits. In making these interpretive decisions, administrators at each of these sites had to determine the role that African Americans and their history would play. In Philipsburg Manor's case, the decision appears to have been relatively easy. Without a culture of segregation in public spaces, African American visitors would not have had trouble visiting the site. In addition, while the materials surrounding the interpretation pointed to the 1750 probate inventory as an authenticating document, there is no evidence that anyone at the museum thought to give much interpretive space to the enslaved

⁷⁰ Arthur Goodfriend to John D. Rockefeller, 3rd, confidential letter, 9 March 1954, Colonial Williamsburg archive, Williamsburg, VA, quoted in Carson, 26.

population listed on that document. At Virginia's Colonial Williamsburg, by contrast, administrators had a much more difficult time grappling with this issue. In addition to questions concerning the representation of slavery at the site, the administrators had to deal with the contemporary southern culture of segregation that made it difficult to even accommodate African American visitors. In many ways, therefore, while the history of slavery did not receive much public attention in this early era, the African American experience was always a part of Colonial Williamsburg's history.

The first rumblings about racial inequality within Colonial Williamsburg began even as Rockefeller was purchasing the land and houses for the restoration. This process was fraught with complications for both the white and black populations of Williamsburg. In the case of the white residents, the restoration purchased their homes and they were either free to move elsewhere or able to inhabit their own home for the rest of their lives. This was not the case for the residents of the 38 "negro dwellings" that the restoration purchased. These residents, whose homes were demolished, were restricted to specific housing that the restoration built within the town. One resident recalled that these new homes were often "so small people [could not] get their furniture in." In addition, while the black residents' previous homes had been interspersed among white residences, their new houses were clustered together. A. Edwin Kendrew, vice president of Colonial Williamsburg later stated, "I heard criticism from Negroes even way back in the forties, saying the Restoration was responsible for promoting segregation. That we

had broken up this wonderful situation of the Negroes living on the same street with whites.”⁷¹

The racial problems at Colonial Williamsburg were not confined to contemporary African Americans but extended to the historic black population as well. As early as 1930, W.A.R. Goodwin proposed a plan for reconstructing slave quarters. While Goodwin’s idea to erect “log cabins or primitive type of houses...in which some old negroes might be placed,” was problematic, he recognized the importance of slavery to historic Williamsburg and felt that it should be a part of the restoration as well. Goodwin was prescient in his belief that “a great mistake would be made if we did not reproduce a sufficient number of these houses to recall the ancient atmosphere and this aspect of the ancient civilization.” Of course, Goodwin’s characterization of the slave history at Colonial Williamsburg as “ancient” was an exaggeration that put more distance between the museum and slavery than was actually the case. Nevertheless, the plan was not put into action as the restoration’s dogged commitment to authenticity flagged when it came to representing the lives and dwellings of the town’s large slave population. As Kendrew noted, “the restoration was not considered a reversion to the original necessarily. It was considered fixing it up and saving what you had and making it better.”⁷² Apparently Rockefeller, who believed an accurate physical restoration would ensure that no scholar could find fault with the restoration, did not expect historians to be concerned with slaves or slavery.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Hayes, “The Background and Beginnings of the Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia” 159, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives, Williamsburg, VA 252-253 quoted in Greenspan, 24; A. Edwin Kendrew, oral history, 525 quoted in Greenspan, 24.

⁷² W.A.R. Goodwin to Arthur Woods, 9 April 1930, RG 3.2E, Box 155, Folder 1354, RFA, quoted in Greenspan, 28; Kendrew, oral history, 598, quoted in Greenspan, 28.

While the colonial dwellings of slaves may have been absent at the restored Colonial Williamsburg, modern day African Americans were always present at the site. The roles that black men and women played at the restoration were emblematic of the city's historic and contemporary racial inequality. The majority of African Americans worked in the site's service industry or as laborers in the ongoing construction projects. Even though black interpreters had worked at sites such as the Powder House and the Wythe House when those properties were owned by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and the Bruton Parish Church respectively, these interpreters were replaced by white men and women when the restoration began. The one exception is the Payne family who lived on the second floor of the Wythe kitchen from 1941 to 1943. The family was paid to "represent blacks in the period" to restoration visitors. As Geraldine Payne recalled, "The entire property was like our home...The girls played in their little costumes and we lived as we always had, except we did it in costume."⁷³ It is unclear whether the Paynes were representing a slave family, although their location within the household of a prominent white family would indicate that they were. Nevertheless, the Paynes would not have been playing the role of slaves nor would they have been talking about the lived experiences of slaves. Instead, during the object-oriented interpretation of the 1940s, it is likely that they would have been talking about the restoration of the servant's quarters and the material culture that surrounded them.

The location of Colonial Williamsburg in the segregated South posed many problems for the administrators. The culture of segregation was so deeply entrenched in

⁷³ Ellis, 35-37; Ellis, 37.

southern life that Goodwin and Rockefeller were forced to accept its inevitable impact on the restoration. This must have been particularly difficult for John D. Rockefeller, Jr., whose family had a long history of supporting black causes. In fact, the historically black Spelman Seminary in Atlanta, now Spelman College, was named after Rockefeller's maternal grandmother. Rockefeller himself was a strong supporter of charities such as the United Negro College Fund and made his feelings about racial equality clear at one of the organization's charity dinners. Rockefeller reflected on the place of African Americans in contemporary society:

After listening to Miss [Dorothy] Maynor's exquisite singing, who can question the fact that...the great fundamental values of life know no boundary of race, color or creed?...

The following facts are matters of common knowledge:

1. That there are 14,000,000 Negroes in the United States – one in ten of the population – more than twice as many as there are individuals in any other of our minority racial groups;
2. That New York...is probably the largest Negro city in the United States; and
3. That all the other racial groups which have come to our shores came voluntarily.

But there are other facts even more significant of which we do well to remind ourselves:

1. That the Negroes came to this country not by choice, but were brought by force and under conditions which have left a blot upon our history that will always darken its pages;
2. That the Negroes were a vital factor in the early development of this country and its wealth; and still are;
3. That there are potentialities in the Negro race which, if given adequate opportunities for development, will make for the broad enrichment of the country, but which if suppressed will inevitably lead to national embitterment;
4. That what the outcome will be, whether enrichment with all its values, or embitterment with all its ugly consequences depends upon you and me and every other decent and fair minded citizen.

The question is not as to our personal feeling about the Negroes, but rather what we as individuals are going to do that these 14,000,000 of our fellow

citizens may be vouchsafed in reality the same right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that our country professedly offers to all its citizens.⁷⁴

Despite Rockefeller's philanthropic activities and personal morality however, W.A.R. Goodwin was forced to respond to a letter from a leader at a local black college who sought to visit the site that, "We take it for granted that the party will be composed exclusively of white persons. It would otherwise occasion you grave embarrassment." By 1943, this response had been formalized in a form letter that was sent to any African American who sought to stay in one of Colonial Williamsburg's hotels. The letter, composed by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., stated, "The management has not thus far found it practicable to provide for both colored and white guests. I (or we are) am sorry we cannot accommodate you (or cannot take care of you; or cannot offer you hospitality)."⁷⁵

After the end of World War II, the paradox of fighting for democracy abroad when it did not exist at home was felt on a national level.⁷⁶ Colonial Williamsburg was not immune from this sentiment but chose not to confront it head-on. Instead, the Board of Directors recommended that the restoration continue its policy of refusing service to African Americans in its restaurants and hotels. Racially mixed groups were informed of this policy and the black members of these groups were housed and fed at the homes of local black residents. The presence of black men and women at the restoration at all provoked complaints from some visitors, one of whom remarked that "at noon-time...literally hundreds of negroes would appear along the main thoroughfare, standing

⁷⁴ 3 May 1949, quoted in Raymond B. Fosdick, *John D. Rockefeller, Jr. A Portrait* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1956), 374-375.

⁷⁵ Rockefeller, Jr. to Chorley, 5 May 1943, quoted in Ellis, 149.

⁷⁶ See Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) for a full discussion of this topic

in large groups, talking and laughing or just lounging against the buildings...[It] made us wonder if you have a colored unemployment problem.”⁷⁷ To this visitor, the presence of black people, who constituted one half of Williamsburg’s historic population, was incongruous within the context of the restoration. In addition, her comment about a “colored unemployment problem” assumes that these African Americans were not her fellow tourists but were instead “lounging” employees.

Racial stereotypes like this one were not confined to the visitors but instead ran throughout the Colonial Williamsburg staff. Stories about naïve or lazy African Americans abounded at the restoration. In one of these stories, for example, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. asked an idle black employee if he had anything better to do. The employee, who did not recognize Rockefeller, responded that “Naw suh, I don’t have nothin to do. I work for Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and he got plenty of money.” As the story goes, this employee was fired the next day.⁷⁸ These stories are telling not only because they reflect the view of contemporary African Americans at Colonial Williamsburg but because they likely played a role in the decision not to interpret African American history. These stereotypes and therefore African American history in general, were antithetical to the American character traits of ingenuity, ambition, intelligence, and independence that Colonial Williamsburg portrayed at its site.⁷⁹ If Colonial

⁷⁷ Ellis, 39; JDR Jr. to Kenneth Chorley, 5 May 1943, RG 3.2E, Box 144, Folder 1260, RFA, quoted in Greenspan, 72; Joanna L.S. Priest to Williamsburg Restoration Committee, 2 December 1956, Letters of Commendation, General Correspondence Records, CWFA, quoted in Greenspan, 75..

⁷⁸ Ellis, 40.

⁷⁹ See Hale, *Making Whiteness*, for a larger discussion of black stereotypes. See also Jo-Ann Morgan. “Mammy the Huckster: Selling the Old South for the New Century,” *American Art* 9, No. 1 (Spring, 1995): 87-109. Huckster discusses popular advertising images and the ways in which they portrayed African American women.

Williamsburg was the birthplace of liberty and the American character, slave history and African Americans had to be absent from its interpretation.

Still, by the early 1950s, Colonial Williamsburg's segregation had become untenable. As may be expected, black visitors did not accept the policy. The experiences of the Cohrons, an African American couple who visited the restoration in 1950, are typical of the troubles black tourists faced at Colonial Williamsburg. This couple, whose experiences were compiled in a letter from George E. Cohron, was forced to stay with one of the African American families in town even though they would have preferred the Williamsburg Inn. While visiting the restoration, they had difficulty finding food as no restaurants would serve them. Cohron eloquently summarized the irony of this blatant inequality in the nation's cradle of liberty, "The Negro suffers these embarrassments, discomforts and disadvantages only because a national project privately financed adheres to local public policies. Is it not irony that Williamsburg, restored and publicized as the place democracy was founded, should permit discrimination or democracy in reverse?" A letter from Hampton College's president, Alonzo G. Moron, made the connection between the United States' international reputation and the policies of Colonial Williamsburg: "In these days when we are trying to hold on to world leadership and to demonstrate the superiority of democracy over other forms of government, we cannot afford to give aid and comfort to any attempt to spread racial discrimination and segregation."⁸⁰ John D. Rockefeller III was particularly sensitive to the international

⁸⁰ George E. Cohron to Allston Boyer, 6 March 1950, RG 2OMR, Box 3, Folder: Racial Question – Williamsburg, 1946-1951, RFA, quoted in Greenspan, 89; Alonzo G. Moron to Doris F. Statler, RG 2OMR, Box 3, Folder: Racial Question – Williamsburg, 1946-1951, RFA, quoted in Greenspan, 90.

effects of segregation at the restoration and drafted a plan for integrating the restoration in 1950. Rockefeller's proposal suggested that the new policy was in keeping with the spirit of the "founders of eighteenth century Williamsburg" and stated that "all people, as they come here to draw inspiration from the Restoration, will be welcomed and housed and fed in our facilities without regard to race, creed or color." The irony of invoking the spirit of slaveholders in the name of racial equality was apparently lost on Rockefeller.⁸¹ This policy was met with resistance from some white Williamsburgers, one of whom refused to attend an interracial luncheon at the restoration. In general, however, the small number of black patrons in the restoration's hotels and restaurants was considered benign, although Colonial Williamsburg's administrators were careful to keep an eye on the proportion of black guests lest the site become too integrated for local tastes.⁸² However fragile and partial the 1950 integration of Colonial Williamsburg was, its appearance four years before the Supreme Court's Brown versus Board of Education decision that paved the way for integration throughout the South made Colonial Williamsburg a trendsetter in the area of racial relations.

Objects as History at Colonial Williamsburg and Philipsburg Manor

As the civil rights movement heated up in the 1950s and boiled over in the 1960s, Colonial Williamsburg appeared to be a disinterested spectator and was little affected by it. As one staff member remembered, "Reverend Collins from First Baptist Church and John Goodbody who worked for the restoration did a lot to cool tempers in Williamsburg.

⁸¹ JDR 3d, "A Statement of Policy," Draft 7, 1950, RG 2OMR, Box 3, Folder: Racial Question – Williamsburg, 1946-1951, RFA, quoted in Greenspan, 90.

⁸² Greenspan, 91.

I remember a group of students came from Hampton Institute to stage a sitin *{sic}* at Woolworth's. Well Reverend Collins contacted them and told them that we didn't need them here. We were handling things amongst ourselves."⁸³ Perhaps the absence of visual reminders of the movement delayed its effect on Colonial Williamsburg because the restoration failed to enact any real interpretive change in response to the revolution outside its borders. The only acknowledgement of the importance of the civil rights movement to the interpretation of Colonial Williamsburg was the preparation of a 1957 study entitled *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg* by Thad W. Tate. The study was apparently solicited by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation without any clear idea for its use on the site's historic core. Tate's narrative did not link the information to any particular interpretive initiative but instead stated that the work was prepared "with the idea that it would for the most part be used by the staff...in whatever way it might serve to aid in the interpretation of restored Williamsburg." It is probable that the work was not put to immediate use since one historian at Colonial Williamsburg remembered that "during that period [after 1957] that Colonial Williamsburg began to hit a plateau that did not end until the mid-'seventies. They were very satisfied with what was being done. They had scripts for interpreters but by the time I arrived they were using ones that had already been written. This is why I say when I arrived there seemed to be nothing new."⁸⁴

⁸³ John Selby, interview by author, Tape recording, Williamsburg, Virginia, 8 August 1987, quoted in Ellis, 195.

⁸⁴ Thad W. Tate, *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1965),vi; Patricia Gibbs, interview by author, Tape recording, Williamsburg, Virginia 28 September 1987, quoted in Ellis, 201.

However complacent Colonial Williamsburg may have been during this era, its established methodology, including the physical recreation of an environment and craft demonstrations, inspired other museums to adopt its programming. The Colonial Williamsburg model became known as living history. Living history, a new concept in the second half of the twentieth century, actually grew out of one of the oldest museum principles, namely, the ability of artifacts to educate. While the earliest museums used artifacts to inculcate specific patriotic and “American” values in visitors, living history practitioners stripped the objects of their indoctrinating qualities and treated the objects themselves as history.

In most museums, living history manifested itself in craft demonstrations that elucidated how one artifact or tool was used to create another and tours that focused on the historic use and provenance of material culture items. Historian Michael Kammen associates this intense interest in living history with “a rejection of the unattractive consequences of Industrialization; yearnings for the pre-industrial era as a golden age of pristine simplicity.”⁸⁵ A focus on skills and objects as the “stuff” of history affects the message that visitors receive from a trip to the museum. In short, “knowledge of objects becomes equated with knowledge of history.”⁸⁶ Using this approach to the telling of history asserts a vision of the past whereby the material comforts of progress are made explicit by a trip to the past via the museum. Conversely, the pressures of the modern world disappear within the focus on the “simple life” of the past. In short, many

⁸⁵ Kammen, 619.

⁸⁶ Michael Ettema, “History Museums and the Culture of Materialism,” in *Past Meets Present* ed. Jo Blatti (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian, 1987), 72.

museums abandoned a history “defined as moral uplift communicated through objects” in favor of “simply learning about the objects themselves.”⁸⁷

Administrators closed Philipsburg Manor in the 1950s to begin the necessary research in order to incorporate some of the themes popularized by Colonial Williamsburg. Philipsburg reopened as a living history museum in 1969, after extensive archaeological investigation and physical changes to the site. In its new incarnation, Philipsburg stopped interpreting the nineteenth-century history of the property under the Beekman family. Because of a new exclusive concentration on the Philipse family, the Beekman wing of the manor house was removed thus bringing the house to its 1720 proportions. In order to “make an early Dutch restoration of the manor that will be second to none in authenticity,” the old mill was razed and replaced with one more typical to 1683.⁸⁸ In the spirit of living history, the new mill was made operable. This necessitated rerouting the road that ran alongside the museum in order to create room for a new dam and mill pond. In addition, an eighteenth-century barn was moved from upstate New York. The addition of the barn and working mill made demonstrations of everyday life and skills possible. The manor house however, remained rooted in the history of the Philipse family.

The interpretation within the new physical site of the museum was handled by costumed guides speaking in the third person. These guides explained various eighteenth-century tasks like milling, dairying, plowing, harvesting, and cooking.

⁸⁷ Ettema, 72.

⁸⁸ “Mill to be Razed at Philipse House: ’47 Restoration Doomed by Historian’s Excavation – Authentic One Planned,” *New York Times*, 28 Jan 1959, p 62.

Contextualizing information about the site accompanied many of these demonstrations. Authenticity was once again the buzz-word of the new interpretation. Costuming at the site was created to “accurately reflect not only the actual time period but also the life style and social standing of the former occupants at each site.”⁸⁹ Designer Bill Combs boasted, “I don’t make costumes; I make reproduction clothing – accurate copies of what people actually wore.”⁹⁰ Even the living animals on the farm were deemed historically authentic: “cows, oxen, and chicken are ‘back-bred’ to resemble animals of the past.”⁹¹

While the focus of the interpretation moved beyond the Philipse family, they were still a central part of a narrative stressing glory and patriotism. The 1969 history of Philipsburg, published by Sleepy Hollow Restorations, hails both Adolph and Frederick II as patriots. It is noted that Adolph led a political party that “fought for more rights for the Colonists thereby eroding the Crown’s prerogatives.”⁹² As a judge on the Peter Zenger libel case, Frederick II was credited with the judgment in a landmark case establishing freedom of the press. Frederick III’s loyalty to the British during the American Revolution was acknowledged, although most historians “believe [Adolph] would have risked property and position to cast his lot with Washington, Adams, and Jefferson.”⁹³ Clearly, the second interpretation at Philipsburg could not move entirely beyond a celebratory history of America in-the-making.

⁸⁹ “Clothes Make the Men and Women at Historic Hudson Valley,” *New York Times*, 1 November 1987, sec. WC, p. 41.

⁹⁰ “Clothes Make the Men and Women at Historic Hudson Valley,” sec. WC, p. 41.

⁹¹ Roberta Hershenson, “New Grants Invigorate Historic Sites,” *New York Times*, 14 July 1991, sec. WC, p. 14.

⁹² *Philipsburg Manor*, (Tarrytown: Sleepy Hollow Restorations: 1969), 36.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 36.

There is no evidence that slavery played a role in the early years of this second interpretation at Philipsburg Manor. This is not surprising as discussing the Philipses' slaveholding would have presented another inconvenient part of the museum's narrative of the quintessential American story. In fact, an investigation of northern slavery at this time would have represented a significant departure from contemporary views of regional history. Since the rise of gradual emancipation movements throughout the North in the wake of the Revolutionary War, northerners cast their region as the abolitionist North that sacrificed in order to free the slaves during the Civil War. The South, in their mind, was the guilty party in the history of slavery.⁹⁴ This ritual forgetting extended well into the twentieth century and led to the exclusion of slavery at Philipsburg Manor for another twenty years.

Colonial Williamsburg's unprecedented recreation of an entire colonial city allowed Americans to "experience" the past in ways that had previously been impossible and inspired a wave of like-minded restorations. In their initial phases however, the depiction of the past at these museums reflected modern social and political preoccupations and the desire for simpler time. In doing so, they created an idealized image of the past that was free from the social inequality and physical hardships that actually characterized it.

The absence of slavery was a large part of this idealized past. While Philipsburg Manor's northern location allowed it to completely skirt the issue of slavery without

⁹⁴ Joanne Pope Melish discussed this process in New England. The interpretive history of Philipsburg Manor suggests that other areas in the North participated in this ritual forgetting of their own slave history and that this amnesia extended well into the twentieth century. See Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and 'Race' in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

raising any eyebrows, Colonial Williamsburg had a harder time dealing with both the contemporary and historic African American population. The first several decades of Colonial Williamsburg's existence were defined by the exclusion of slave history from their interpretation and the relative exclusion of contemporary African Americans from the museum. Just as African American visitors forced the administration of Colonial Williamsburg to reexamine their policy of segregation, however, Americans in the later part of the twentieth century would force museums to reconsider the selective narratives told at their sites. One forward-thinking visitor to Colonial Williamsburg looked forward to this change in 1961: "It seems...to reflect the period only very partially in that what is restored represents the houses and domestic arrangements of only the very rich...if it is possible, future efforts should look to portrayal of other levels of 18th century Williamsburg society."⁹⁵ As the social and academic atmosphere changed in the 1960s and 1970s, museums would be challenged to find ways to incorporate those "other levels" of society into their interpretations.

⁹⁵ Marvin Frankel to Colonial Williamsburg, 18 April 1961, Letters of Commendation, General Correspondence Records, CWFA quoted in Greenspan, 126.

CHAPTER 3

Representing a Nation within the National Park Service and National Trust for Historic Preservation

On a hot summer day in 2005, I sat down to speak with National Park Service (NPS) historian Karen Kinzey at the Lee mansion, Arlington House, on the grounds of Arlington National Cemetery. Arlington House had recently debuted its new tour that was, in part, an answer to the Park Service's initiative to more thoroughly interpret the history of slavery at their holdings. Arlington House operates as many Park Service sites do; staff members are available to answer questions but the brochure provides the bulk of the interpretation during the tour. Kinzey related a story that neatly summed up the challenges that the National Park Service faces as it tries to effectively interpret slavery at their sites. On the same day that the new brochure was distributed, a group from the Daughters of the Confederacy came to visit the mansion. After using the brochure to navigate through the rooms of the mansion, a representative from the Daughters of the Confederacy expressed her displeasure with the fact that the new tour focused only on slavery. Later that same day, a group from the Black Heritage Museum of Arlington came to the site and emerged from their tour with a complaint. According to this group of visitors, the tour said nothing about slavery. At the conclusion of the story, Kinzey threw up her hands in a defeated gesture and asked, "What can you do?"¹

Since the 1970s, the National Park Service has been trying to answer that question through numerous studies of its interpretation of African American history at both its historic parks and battlefield parks. Charged with the official task of preserving "for

¹ Karen Kinzey, interview by author, author's notes, Arlington, VA., 11 August 2005.

public use historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States,”² the Park Service has struggled to balance the sometimes competing agendas of the “people of the United States.” Similarly, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP), which was created by a congressional charter in 1947 as a “charitable, educational, and nonprofit corporation...to receive donations of sites, buildings, and objects significant in American history and culture, to preserve and administer them for the public benefit,” has faced problems as it has tried to expand its programming. While the NTHP does much more than operate historic homes, it has amassed a large and diverse collection of these sites that are operated as historic house museums. As in the case of the Park Service, the National Trust has created institution-wide initiatives to expand its interpretation of slavery.

This chapter will examine the history of the Park Service and the National Trust as it relates to issues of race and slavery. Both of these institutions were founded on the idea that the preservation of historic buildings, areas, and monuments was crucial to the future of the United States. As early as 1915, National Park Service administrators wondered “What more noble purpose could our national parks serve as to be the instrument by which the people shall be lured into the far corners of the land that they may learn to love it?”³ During World War II, the National Park Service’s task was no less than providing sites and historical programming that allowed “individual citizens

² “An Act to Provide for the Preservation of Historic American Sites, Buildings, Objects, and Antiquities of National Significance, And for Other Purposes,” Approved August 21, 1935 (49 Stat. 666), quoted in Lary M. Dilsaver, ed. *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994), 132.

³ Department of the Interior, *Report of the General Superintendent and Landscape Engineer of National Parks to the Secretary of the Interior, 1915* (Washington, D.C.:GPO, 1915), 6 quoted in Schaffer, 92.

faced by a troubled world [to turn] to the national historical parks and shrines for a renewal of their faith in the country's traditions and the country's destiny, for encouragement, and patriotic inspiration."⁴ The 1948 "Report of the Committee on Organization of the National Trust" made the connection between historic preservation, national identity, and the nation's future clear by beginning its report with the following quote from Carl Sandburg's *Remembrance Rock*: "If America forgets where she came from, if the people lose sight of what brought them along, if she listens to the deniers and mockers, then will rot and dissolution begin." The report continued, noting that historical sites "are the tangible reminders of our past; they are priceless treasures of the national wealth; and they are irreplaceable, for although copies can be made, they never have the meaning of the originals. We are spendthrifts indeed if we sit idly by, allowing the obliteration for all time of these monuments to our national democratic heritage. We are worse than spendthrifts if we disregard the educational opportunities for the strengthening of our democratic foundations which these sites and buildings exemplify."⁵

Founded and guided by such lofty rhetoric, the National Trust's and Park Service's choices for which sites to preserve and how to focus their interpretation take on particular meaning for American identity. The way in which those choices evolved throughout the twentieth century also provides a mirror to changing national values.

⁴ Barry Mackintosh, "Other Agendas," *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective* [book on-line] (Washington, D.C.: History Division, National Park Service, 1986, accessed 13 December 2005); available from:

http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/mackintosh2/directions_av_other.htm; Internet.

⁵ "Report of the Committee on Organization of the National Trust, 1948," quoted in Elizabeth D. Mulloy, *The History of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1963-1973* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States, 1976), Appendix 2.

After a discussion of the early interpretive efforts of these organizations, this chapter will pay particular attention to their recent decisions to expand the narrative of American history by fostering a discussion of American slavery where appropriate. As national organizations, the Park Service and National Trust face different challenges than private museums. First, different constituencies within the American public expect to see their history related at these national museums. This is especially true for Park Service sites where, as federal lands, the museums themselves belong to the American people. The necessity of juggling the competing narratives of both the Daughters of the Confederacy and African American heritage groups, for example, has been particularly important for these museums because they are charged with relating the history of “the people of the United States.” In addition, both the National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation operate numerous historic sites within the United States and therefore their institution-wide interpretive initiatives reach exponentially more people than the interpretations at even the most popular individual museums. Created in consultation with academic historians, the new interpretations at NPS and NTHP sites are a good indication of the ways in which research within the academy has filtered into public history. Additionally, the public reaction to these interpretations reflects the readiness of the American people to accept these new interpretations as part of the public culture. Taken as a whole therefore, the interpretations at the Park Service and the National Trust sites provide a glimpse of the changing narrative of American history.

Race, Slavery, and Preservation in the Early Years of the National Park Service

For the first several decades of their existence, both the National Park Service and the National Trust essentially ignored slavery at their museums. To be fair, each organization had its hands full with the newness of their respective roles and spent a great deal of time working on the mechanics of preservation such as identifying and acquiring endangered properties and creating a mechanism to preserve and sustain them.⁶ In fact, the NPS had been in existence for over a decade before NPS director Horace Albright successfully lobbied to include historical areas in the system alongside such natural wonders as Yellowstone National Park. The Park Service's role in the preservation of history was formalized in the previously mentioned "Act to Provide for the Preservation of Historic American Sites, Buildings, Objects, and Antiquities of National Significance, And for Other Purposes" in 1935.

The language of its congressional mandate affected the Park Service's perception of which historic sites, people, and events were worthy of preservation by restricting the Park Service to the preservation of "sites, buildings, and objects...which possess exceptional value as commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States."⁷ The NPS administration, by way of its advisory committee on the organization's historical program, took this language to heart, advocating that the NPS acquire "all types of areas that are historically important in our national development," and it used the War Department's piecemeal acquisition of battlefields as an example of the pitfalls of

⁶ See Lary M. Dilsaver, ed. *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1994) for a more complete overview of the early years of the National Park Service. Elizabeth D. Mulloy's *The History of the National Trust for Historic Preservation: 1963-1973* (Washington, D.C., The Preservation Press, 1976) provides a useful narrative of the history of the NTHP from its inception in 1947 until 1973.

⁷ Dilsaver, 132.

creating parks without an overarching policy. The committee's report stated that the War Department holdings represented some areas that were "undoubtedly of the highest importance" but argued that "others may not be." The report further bemoaned the fact that the battlefields did not represent "all of the most important historical shrines of American history, even in the field of military endeavor."⁸

For the National Park Service, pursuing a policy of acquiring the most important sites for the demonstration of American history meant following a pattern set by previous historic sites such as Colonial Williamsburg. To this end, NPS leaders focused their attention on the nation's colonial and Revolutionary history. In 1930, the NPS acquired Colonial National Historic Park, a single park that subsumed the Jamestown settlement and the site of Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown. Together with nearby Colonial Williamsburg, this park would "unfold the story of the establishment of the first permanent English settlement in 1607, of the development of Colonial life in Tidewater Virginia, and the flowering of its political and cultural greatness in the 18th century, and of the culmination of the Colonial period with the achievement of American independence at Yorktown in 1781."⁹ In the same year, the Park Service also acquired the site of the George Washington birthplace. While the Mount Vernon Ladies Association had long and ably operated Mount Vernon as a shrine to the founding father,

⁸ Harlan D. Unrau and G. Frank Williss, "Creation and Activities of the History Division," *Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s: Administrative History* [book on-line] (Denver: National Park Service, 1983, accessed 14 August 2008); available from http://www.nps.gov/history/online_books/unrau-williss/adhi5b.htm; Internet.

⁹ "Historical Methods Used in the Development of Colonial National Monument," paper presented to Session on Archeological and Historic Sites, Meeting of American Planning and Civic Association, Washington, D.C., 23 January 1936, in Albright Papers, Box 9, quoted in Unrau and Williss, "Historical Program at Colonial National Monument."

the Park Service apparently felt that they needed a site dedicated to Washington's personal history and acquired his Westmoreland County birthplace. The NPS's zeal to associate its historic parks with Washington is evidenced by their willingness to acquire the site despite its less than convenient location 75 miles outside of Washington, D.C., and the fact that the actual home in which Washington was born burned in 1779, leaving no record of what it looked like. Despite these challenges, the Park Service went along with plans to build a replica of the house, called the "Memorial Mansion," on its supposed foundations. The actual foundation of Washington's birthplace was discovered by archaeologists soon after the Memorial Mansion was created. Despite this fact, the NPS continued to interpret the Memorial Mansion as "traditionally the one in which George Washington was born in 1732" until 1975 when it acknowledged the actual site nearby.¹⁰ Still, as one Park Service history notes, "The Memorial Mansion remains to challenge park interpreters and confuse visitors, who find it hard to understand why an old-looking house at Washington's birthplace is not his birthplace or even a facsimile."¹¹

In 1933, the NPS bolstered its connection with Washington through its more auspicious acquisition of the several Revolutionary War sites in Morristown, New Jersey. This area, which would later become Morristown National Historic Park, comprised the encampment grounds at Jockey Hollow and Washington's headquarters at the Ford Mansion complete with the significant archives held at the house. To NPS administrators, the new park at Morristown more clearly articulated the direction of the

¹⁰ Paul Hudson, *George Washington Birthplace National Monument, Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1956), 21, quoted in Mackintosh; *George Washington Birthplace National Monument, Virginia* (NPS brochure, 1975).

¹¹ Mackintosh.

history program at the Park Service and fit with the congressional directive that allowed for the preservation of historic sites because “using those great values at Morristown which had so much to do with the story of the American Revolution, we could not only apply the term National Historical Park to this area under the provisions of the Act that Congress passed but we could administratively set up the kind of historical program...that...was necessary.”¹²

Through the creation of Morristown National Historic Park, the NPS was able to move beyond the standard historic shrines such as Mount Vernon and Monticello that told the nation’s history through a look into its founders’ private lives. This process was furthered by the NPS’s acquisition of the War Department’s historic forts and battlefields in 1933. Though administrators may have bemoaned the helter skelter manner in which these parks were acquired, the inclusion of such pivotal battlefields as Vicksburg, Shiloh, and Gettysburg fit well with the NPS’s mission to preserve and interpret the significant sites in American history. Indeed, after these acquisitions, national battlefield parks were disproportionately represented among the Park Service’s historic holdings.

Park Service administrators were cognizant of the opportunities that this sudden expansion of historic sites and battlefields provided. NPS chief historian Verne E. Chatelain hoped to acquire and interpret enough sites that “the sum total of the sites...make it possible for us to tell a more or less complete story of American history.” Together, these sites would “sketch the larger patterns of American history.” The 1934

¹² Interview of Verne E. Chatelain by Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., September 9, 1961, quoted in Unrau and Willis, “Morristown National Historic Park.”

Annual Report from Park Service Director Arno B. Cammerer indicated that the addition of War Department lands would further the NPS's interpretation of American history, which was dominated by the triumphant march of white civilization across the country:

The ideal Federal program of historic sites preservation thus appears to be in a fair way of realization in this unity of jurisdiction under the National Park Service. Already a basic philosophy has been evolved by which the different areas in the system are related to each other in definite fashion. Thus from the earliest prehistoric events of American life down to the time when the white man, after over three centuries spent in conquering American soil, conquered also the air, historic sites connected with various steps of this amazing drama of civilization will be preserved and used for the purpose of interpreting this engrossing story to those who visit these areas.

Cammerer's comments show the influence of cultural evolutionary theorists such as Edmund Tylor on historical understanding, although this focus on the progress of white civilization did not restrict the Park Service's acquisitions to those sites associated with white history. In fact, the NPS already had begun protecting those prehistoric and archaeological sites associated with Native Americans but, as Cammerer's report indicates, these sites were used as evidence of the earlier stages of the country's evolution and foils for the triumph of white America.¹³

The War Department acquisitions, in particular those battlefields associated with the Civil War, eventually would play a role in the Park Service's interpretation of slavery,

¹³ Letter, Chatelain to Demaray, 21 Apr. 1933, quoted in Unrau and Williss, *Expansion of the National Park Service*, 166; Mackintosh, 15; "Annual Report of the Director of the National Park Service," 1934, in *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1934*, pp. 170-71, 182, quoted in Unrau and Williss, "Impact of New Deal Programs and Reorganization of 1933 on National Park Service Historical Program Development," Marguerite S. Shaffer, in *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001) makes a complimentary argument and provides historical precedent for Cammerer's worldview. She argues that African Americans, Native-Americans, and other minorities themselves were tourist attractions for white middle-class American tourists in the late 19th century. Shaffer argues on page 280 that comparisons between white tourists and others "implied not only a racially defined, hierarchical social order in which American civilization represented the highest stage of development but [the tourist's] own position as part of that elite American culture."

although their early history gave no indication of that future. In 1940, the National Park Service furthered its mission to interpret the significant events of American history by buying the land constituting the Manassas National Battlefield Park. This action formalized the land's use as a Civil War memorial, a purpose that it had been de facto serving since Confederate troops erected a small stone monument to their commander six weeks after the First Battle of Manassas.¹⁴ Before the NPS's acquisition of Manassas, the site had also played a role in the creation of a national narrative by serving as a venue for sectional reconciliation following the Civil War. In 1906, for example, Confederate and Union veterans gathered at the battlefield to erect monuments to two New York Volunteer Regiments. The ceremony, though it took place in an unprecedented downpour, featured the hand claspings and rhetoric that accompanied many such battlefield reunions. Former Confederate Edmund Berkeley clearly articulated the meaning of the day's events: "No greater proof could be possible that we have now a reunited country, from which all feeling of sectionalism and bitterness are passing away and destined to become a thing of the past, than to see the men who wore the blue uniting with the men who wore the gray in such a work of love as they are engaged in today."¹⁵ In addition, the NPS's purchase of the land from the Sons of Confederate Veterans was its own symbol of reunion as the property that had been purchased and maintained by former Confederates came under the control of the federal government. This fact was not

¹⁴ Joan M. Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 2; Unrau and Williss.

¹⁵ "Unveiled at Bull Run" *The Washington Post*; October 21, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1992), 8; See Blight, *Race and Reunion*, for an expanded analysis of battlefield reunions following the Civil War.

lost on the Sons of Confederate Veterans whose leadership only agreed to the sale of the land once it heard evidence of the “fair and even treatment” with which other Civil War battlefields had been interpreted by the NPS.¹⁶

Of course, at the time of the transfer of the War Department sites, the Park Service also received Arlington House, a different venue to further sectional reconciliation. The interpretive purpose at Manassas, therefore, would be to explain the battles themselves. Historian and Manassas Park superintendent Joseph Mills Hanson approached the interpretation of the battlefield with zeal, retracing the steps of the forces and restoring the landscape to its appearance during the battle. In addition, Hanson created text for sixty different markers, which led visitors through the battlefield.¹⁷ Within the site’s battlefield museum, Hanson proposed building interpretive exhibits that would focus on the following themes: the geography of the battlefield, First Manassas, Second Manassas, and the larger context of the war in Northern Virginia. Historic weapons and uniforms, maps, and dioramas would make up a majority of the displays. Hanson also planned an exhibit that would examine local plantations before and after the war to provide a social context for the military maneuvers that were the focus of the museum. Discussion of the causes of the war as well as its effect on the local slave population and women were absent in these initial plans.¹⁸

The United States’ entry into World War II gave new meaning to the Park Service’s mission and had several effects on the interpretation at Manassas, in particular.

¹⁶ Zenzen, 24.

¹⁷ Zenzen, 21.

¹⁸ Zenzen, 33.

For the National Park Service as a whole, the context of World War II imbued the organization's interpretive work with new import. In 1940 the Department of the Interior's Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments passed a resolution stating that the "interpretive program in national park areas, particularly the historical parks and monuments and the great national scenic areas, is one of the most valuable contributions by any Federal agency in promoting patriotism, in sustaining morale, and understanding of the fundamental principles of American democracy, and in inspiring love for our country." The Board directed that "the National Park Service should immediately undertake the encouragement of national pride in our new armed forces as well as our citizenry, which is so essential for the defense and preservation of our country." This sentiment was echoed in a separate 1940 directive from the regional office administering the eastern historical parks: "All types of historical park literature should place greater emphasis upon the principles of freedom, democracy, and self rule that underlie the basic political philosophy of the American people and our constitution."¹⁹ Wartime shortages of labor and funds necessitated that Hanson's exhibit plan for Manassas would have to wait to be realized in its entirety although the spirit and focus of the museum remained the same. Hanson's specific plantation exhibit, however, was replaced by period photos and depictions of Northern Virginia. Additionally, local military personnel became the primary visitors to the battlefield after gas rationing curbed average Americans' travel plans.

¹⁹ Advisory Board Reports, History Division quoted in Mackintosh, "Other Agendas."

The context of World War II also lent new meaning to the interpretation of Manassas. As was the case at sites like Colonial Williamsburg and Philipsburg Manor, World War II presented an opportunity to create a vision of American heritage that had meaning for contemporary America. Hanson added displays comparing the casualties of World War II with those of the Civil War and compared the “spiritual dividends” that the Civil War battlefield provided to those of World War II battlefields.²⁰ The 1940 dedication of a statue of Stonewall Jackson on the site on which he earned his famous nickname also provided an opportunity to reflect on the Civil War’s contemporary meaning. Referring to Jackson, one speaker noted, “A nation that produced that man need fear no foe hereafter.” Governor James Price of Virginia provided an analysis of the meaning of the Civil War that expressed his vision of American history: “In honoring one of the greatest soldiers of the Anglo-Saxon race, we are letting the world know that we are ready to take up the challenge of arbitrary power, ready to give our all in defense of that freedom for which our forefathers so often fought in days gone by.” He warned that, “to do less would be to show ourselves unworthy of the sires whom we have met here to honor...commemorating a great war of the past in a world inflamed with war from Suez to the English Channel.”²¹ Price’s analysis of the war unified white America as the descendents of the great men who had defended freedom while simultaneously forgetting the contributions of other Americans in those same battles.

²⁰ Joseph Mills Hanson, “Some Observations on the Manassas National Battlefield Park and Its Problems,” 1944, 1-5, file Park History, Historian’s Files, Manassas National Battlefield Park, quoted in Zenzen, 34-36.

²¹ Scott Hart, “Confederates Witness Honor done Jackson,” *The Washington Post (1877-1954)*; Sept. 1, 1940, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1992), 3.

The narrowly focused interpretation of Civil War battlefields, combined with the nationally funded shrine to Confederate general Robert E. Lee at Arlington National Cemetery indicates that the National Park Service used its historic parks to create a vision of American history that stressed the unity and shared valor of white Americans at the expense of the history and contributions of African Americans.²² Historian Marguerite Shaffer finds the roots of this vision of American history and identity in the policies set forth by the NPS for its natural parks in the 1920s.²³ In 1923, Park Service executive secretary Robert Sterling Yark expounded on the unifying benefits of the parks: “Perhaps for the first time one realizes the common America – and loves it...It is the enforced democracy and the sense of common ownership in these parks that works this magic. They have rediscovered to us the American people...In the National Parks, all are just Americans.”²⁴ As Shaffer points out, the “American people,” “were embodied by a newly emerging dominant class that was becoming a predominantly white, middle- and upper-class constituency in the twentieth century.” In fact, some discussions at the 1922 parks conference focused around administrators’ concerns about black visitors and suggested that they be dissuaded from using the parks. The minutes of the conference included the following discussion: “One of the objections to colored people is that if they come in large groups they will be conspicuous, and will not only be objected to by other visitors

²² David Blight argues that the reconciliation of the north and south after the Civil War was accomplished by sacrificing the equality of African Americans. See Blight, *Race and Reunion*.

²³ See Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

²⁴ Robert Sterling Yark, “The People and the National Parks,” *Survey Graphic*, August 1922, 547 quoted in Shaffer, 125. Shaffer’s analysis of visitation and administration at NPS parks such as Yellowstone indicates that the NPS in the 1920s had “an understanding of democracy focused more on geography than race or class.” See Shaffer, 125.

but will cause trouble among the hotel and camp help, and it will be impossible to serve them. Individual cases can be handled, although even this is awkward, but organized parties could not be taken care of... While we cannot openly discriminate against them, they should be told that the parks have no facilities for taking care of them.”²⁵

This policy extended at least into the 1939 museum planning at Manassas National Battlefield Park where administrators debated several options for “colored toilets” only to decide to provide one set of facilities for white visitors.²⁶ Furthermore, even though NPS policy provided for “separate facilities for white and colored people to the extent only as is necessary to conform with the generally accepted customs long established in Virginia,” debate and delay postponed the building of adequate separate facilities for African American visitors at Shenandoah National Park.²⁷ The actions of National Park Service administrators in the southern parks demonstrate that they envisioned a predominately white population of visitors. The history of the parks in the 1930s also indicates that white unity and reconciliation was a Park Service imperative. Just as interpretations at battlefield parks like Manassas celebrated the combat heroics of both Union and Confederate forces while avoiding hot button topics such as the causes of the war, the NPS’ policies regarding segregation were similarly designed to placate southern constituents.

²⁵ “Accommodations for Colored People,” Entry 6, General, Minutes, Sixth National Parks Conference, 1922, RG 79, NA, Maryland, quoted in Shaffer, 126.

²⁶ “Some Suggestions re R.O. Preliminary Plan for Manassas Administration Building,” 20 February 1940, and Thomas Vint to Regional Director, Region 1, 19 September 1939, both in file Manassas Correspondence 1939-1948, NPS History Division Files; E.M. Lisle to Director, 15 March 1940, file Park Visitor Center, Historian’s Files, MNBP, quoted in Zenzen, n21, 221.

²⁷ Reed Engle, “Shenandoah: Laboratory for Change,” *Resource Management Newsletter*, January 1996 [article on-line]; available from: <http://www.nps.gov/shen/362d1.htm>; Internet; accessed 10 January 2006.

By the late 1930s, however, the NPS policy on segregation began to shift. In 1939, the Associate Director of the Department of the Interior, Arthur E. Demaray, directed the staff at Shenandoah to “immediately provide some facilities for Negroes so that charge cannot be made that we are not furnishing at least the same type and character of facilities that are provided for whites.”²⁸ Demaray’s memo indicates that the NPS felt some sense of obligation to African Americans or, at least, that African Americans could make a strong case that the federal government was discriminating against them in the parks. This concern was in line with a Department of the Interior lawyer’s findings that Shenandoah’s unequal accommodations for black visitors rendered “segregation of the races as now practiced [an] infringement of constitutional principles.”²⁹ In 1940, NPS administrators directed the staff at Shenandoah that “no mention will be made of segregation on the map or in the park literature.”³⁰ The Park Service’s decision not to publicize the separate facilities could indicate that administrators still sought to discourage African American visitation. The fact that Shenandoah administrators planned an integrated picnic area at Shenandoah in 1939, however, also indicates that NPS administrators had grown increasingly uneasy with the incongruity of segregation at National Parks.³¹

In the next decade, the context of World War II and the United States’ global fight for democracy only exacerbated this sense of unease. As Mary Dudziak asks in her study

²⁸ A.E. Demaray to Shenandoah National Park Director, February 11, 1939 [resource on-line]; available from: www.nps.gov/shen/historyculture/segregation.htm; Internet; accessed 10 January 2006, quoted in Engle, “Shenandoah: Laboratory for Change.”

²⁹ Engle, “Shenandoah: Laboratory for Change.”

³⁰ Engle, “Shenandoah: Laboratory for Change.”

³¹ Engle, “Shenandoah: Laboratory for Change.”

of the impact of World War II and the Cold War on civil rights, “How could American democracy be a beacon during the Cold War, and a model for those struggling against Soviet oppression, if the United States itself practiced brutal discrimination within its own borders?”³² In 1947, President Truman’s President’s Committee on Civil Rights noted that domestic civil rights were cause for international concern: “Our foreign policy is designed to make the United States an enormous, positive influence for peace and progress throughout the world. We have tried to let nothing...stand in the way of this goal. But our domestic civil rights shortcomings are a serious obstacle.” In support of their findings, the report quoted Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who stated that he had “good reason to hope for the continued and increased effectiveness of public and private efforts to do away with [discrimination].”³³ Separate discussions by the President’s Committee on Civil Rights had particular meaning for the National Park Service because they indicated both that the federal government was particularly obligated to set an example for race relations and that the country was beginning to tire of placating the unreconstructed South. In speaking of segregation within the armed forces, a committee member noted, “Segregation is wrong wherever it exists, but when our Government holds up before its citizens the Constitution, with the Bill of Rights, saying to every man that he is a citizen and appealing to him for loyalty in peace and war on that

³² Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 2.

³³ President’s Committee on Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 139-148, quoted in Dudziak, 80-81.

basis, then I don't think we have any right to permit the pattern that has grown up in any section of the country to dominate the national policy.”³⁴

As conversations about the impact of segregation on American international standing played out on Capitol Hill, the NPS began the process of integration. For the Park Service, this process began with a 1945 Executive Order mandating the integration of all concessions within the national parks. In parks like Shenandoah, this move was met with opposition by conservative vendors who built and operated those concessions and felt that “this company was assured that the facilities...would be reserved for the exclusive use of White people..and as evidence of the Park Service’s intentions...the Lewis Mountain development has always carried the designation, ‘for the exclusive use of negroes.’ Instead of improving racial relations, [desegregation] would be a distinct dis-service to the negroes desiring to visit the park.” Attitudes like these delayed the planned integration of parks like Shenandoah, but by 1950, the facilities were fully integrated.³⁵

Alongside easing segregation policies, the National Park Service also made gestures of inclusion to African Americans by designating historic sites in honor of George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington in 1943 and 1956 respectively.³⁶ These additions, which will be discussed later, commemorated prominent and non-controversial figures and thus did not represent a tremendous change in the historic

³⁴ President’s Committee on Civil Rights, transcript of meeting, 30 June 1947, Papers of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Reel 6, Truman Library, quoted in Dudziak, 84-85.

³⁵ Engle, “Shenandoah: Laboratory for Change.”

³⁶ See Patricia West, *Domesticating History*, for an expanded account of the founding of the Booker T. Washington Monument. West discusses the federal government’s role in administering museums as part of the professionalization of preservation that excluded women. West also discusses the ways in which the government’s role in historic preservation politicized the movement.

philosophy of the National Park Service. In fact, these men, both of whom rose from slavery to become successful, epitomized the possibilities that American freedom afforded and provided an instructive example for modern African Americans.

Initial Preservation and Interpretation at the National Trust

As the National Park Service was integrating parks like Shenandoah, the National Trust for Historic Preservation was still in its infancy and while the early years of the Trust would in some ways mirror the activities of the NPS, significant differences between the organizations existed. The 1948 law that created the National Trust was, in fact, an extension of the Historic Sites Act of 1935 that guided the National Park Service's historic interpretation. This same act also created an arrangement whereby the National Trust could consult with the NPS Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, and Monuments "on matters relating to the selection of sites, buildings, and objects to be preserved and protected pursuant hereto."³⁷

The Trust's public charter and its relationship with the NPS linked its goals to the interpretive agenda of the Park Service and the federal government. In fact, the Trust's first set of criteria for evaluating historic sites and buildings was taken from the National Park Service's criteria as set forth by the 1930s Historic Sites Survey.³⁸ Predictably therefore, the Trust's first acquisition was a house associated with George Washington. This time the site was Woodlawn Plantation in Mount Vernon, Virginia. Martha Washington's granddaughter Eleanor Parke Custis Lewis, who had been raised by

³⁷ "Public Law 81-408, Establishing The National Trust, And Public Law 83-160, Amending Public Law 81-408," quoted in Mulloy, Appendix 3.

³⁸ Mulloy, 13.

George and Martha Washington, lived in the home with her husband Lawrence Lewis, Washington's nephew. While the Trust operated the site beginning in 1948, it did so via a long-term lease from a private foundation. Not only did the site's historic association with George Washington necessitate that the Trust operate it as a museum, a function that the private foundation was apparently unable to fulfill, but presumably, the prestige associated with the property reflected well on the nascent National Trust. It was not until 1957 that the Trust acquired the title to Woodlawn. The unique situation at Woodlawn was possible, in part, because of the significant operational differences that existed between the National Trust and the Park Service. First, unfettered by government regulations, the Trust was better able to adapt its policy to fit individual preservation situations (such as those at Woodlawn) and handle emergencies that may call for quick action. Perhaps more important for the early history of the Trust was the fact that the National Trust relied largely on private donations and voluntary support. The founding Board of Trustees for the National Trust thus included some of the most illustrious names in American society including Louise du Pont Crowninshield, heiress of the du Pont Winterthur Estate; Ulysses S. Grant, III; and Herbert Hoover.³⁹

It was perhaps these elite connections that led to the National Trust's acquisition of Decatur House, which was willed to the Trust by Marie Oge Beale. Beale inherited the home from her husband Truxton Beale, whose family had owned it since the 1870s. Decatur House was built by renowned architect Benjamin Latrobe for Stephen Decatur and his wife in 1818. As a naval hero from the War of 1812 and the Barbary Wars,

³⁹ "Board of Trustees, 1950-1973," quoted in Mulloy, Appendix 5.

Decatur was a major celebrity in early nineteenth-century America. Decatur instructed Latrobe to build a home “fit for entertaining” in Washington D.C.’s Lafayette Square, adjacent to the White House. Latrobe’s design, a 3-story brick Federal-style mansion was the first private residence in Lafayette Park and was occupied by the Decatur family until 1820 when Stephen Decatur was killed in a duel against Commodore James Barron. Unable to live in the home that she briefly had shared with her husband, Susan Decatur rented Decatur House. During this time, the conveniently located home became the temporary residence of some of the country’s most important men including Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren. In 1836, the house was sold to hotelier John Gadsby. While the house had been the residence of many slaves who tended its wealthy occupants, Gadsby built a separate dependency behind the house as a slave quarters. Decatur House was bought by General Edward Beale in 1870 and remained in the Beale family until the National Trust acquired it.⁴⁰ During the Beales’ occupancy, the home was used for lavish parties including an annual dinner after the White House reception for the Diplomatic Corps and various State Department occasions, a use that was certainly in keeping with the spirit of Latrobe’s design.⁴¹ Beale also was mindful of the house’s historic properties and associations. During Marie Beales’s residency, she removed various Victorian improvements to the house to restore it to “the original purity of Latrobe’s design.” In addition, she left many of the rooms undisturbed, even refraining from adding electricity. Last, in 1950 Marie Beale allowed the Naval Historical

⁴⁰ “A Brief History of Decatur House”, [on-line], accessed 24 August 2008; available from: <http://www.decatourhouse.org/site/history.htm>.

⁴¹ Mary Van Rensselaer Thayer, “These Three Historic Mansions Are Still Busy Making History,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1954-1959)*, 3 April 1955, F3, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

Foundation to open the Truxtun-Decatur Naval Museum in her carriage house. The museum featured rotating exhibits celebrating the nation's naval history.⁴²

The home had thus always been associated with the nation's fabulously wealthy and the National Trust initially continued its traditional use as a gathering space for the American elite and focused its interpretation on its distinguished occupants. Beale's will stipulated that the Naval Department and the State Department still would be able to use the home for official functions and it continued to serve in this capacity through the 1950s.⁴³ Two years after Marie Beale's death, the house first opened as a National Trust museum, despite indications that "the endowment asked for and granted is scarcely enough to keep up Decatur House properly, much less show it with flair or make use of its lovely, high-ceilinged rooms for VIP entertaining."⁴⁴

Whether or not the lack of funding at the National Trust required it to sacrifice Decatur House's "flair," financial considerations certainly guided the home's initial interpretation. It is likely, for example, that the house was largely unfurnished when the Trust initially began to show it.⁴⁵ Additionally, Marie Beale's 1954 book, *Decatur House and Its Inhabitants*, the profits of which benefited the NTHP, likely served as the chief source of information for the interpreters. Beale's book offers a brief biography of

⁴² Liz Hillenbrand, "Mrs. Beale's Historic Decatur House May Have Brilliant Future in Store," *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1954-1959)*, 20 June 1956, 15, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988); "Private Naval Museum to Open Soon," *The Washington Post (1877-1954)*, 12 February 1950, M7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

⁴³ For example see, Mary McNair, "Barbary Hero's House Lights Up," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 3 October 1959, D5, Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

⁴⁴ Mary Van Rensselaer Thayer, "These Three Historic Mansions Are Still Busy Making History," *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1954-1959)*, 3 April 1955, F3, Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

⁴⁵ Sarah Booth Conroy, "Time Travels Backward on Jackson Place," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 14 May 1967, K1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

each of the house's principle inhabitants alongside accounts of their time at Decatur House. Tours of the house, which were offered on Wednesdays and Saturdays, likely focused on the personalities of its famous inhabitants and the home's architectural features. Contemporary articles mention its inlay floors, frescoed ceilings, and breathtaking staircases. Additionally, an article announcing the 1958 opening of the home matter-of-factly states its history: "Decatur's home was a center of Washington social life until the Naval officer was mortally wounded in a duel with Commodore James Barron in 1820. His widow left and the house was rented to a succession of prominent people, including Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren."⁴⁶ The home's long lineage and certain improvements made by the Beales and its other inhabitants also would have necessitated that it be interpreted in a variety of different periods. For example, one of the house's principal architectural features, an inlay floor, was added in the 1870s by the Beales.⁴⁷

It is unlikely that slavery was part of this initial interpretation except perhaps to note that servants would have been part of the lavish lifestyle of Decatur House. *Decatur House and its Inhabitants* frankly includes slavery in its discussion of the house during hotelier John Gadsby's ownership: "It was true that Gadsby dabbled in the slave trade, and conducted slave auctions in the walled enclosure behind the house. In the course of

⁴⁶ "Decatur House is Now Open To the Public," *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1854-1959)*, 26 October 1958, B14, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

⁴⁷ See for example, Mary McNair, "Barbary Hero's House Lights Up," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 3 October 1959, D5, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988); George W. Oakes, "Washington Walking Tour," *New York Times (1857-Current file)*, 10 September 1961, XX15, in ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2001); Winola McLendon, "Navy to Board Decatur House," *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1954-1959)*, Mar 30, 1958, F4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988); "Historic Decatur House Bequeathed to Trust," *The Washington Post (1877-1954)*, May 2, 1953, 18, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

this business he occasionally kept some of them in the servants' quarters." Beale also reports that Gadsby shipped large numbers of slaves to Georgia cotton plantations and that some of Gadsby's contemporaries reported hearing "'their howls and cries,'" though she notes that "this seems like a fanciful exaggeration."⁴⁸ Interestingly, it seems as though Beale included the house's history as a slave auction site as a way to disparage John Gadsby and not out of any concern over historical accuracy or interest in slavery. Beale appears to view Gadsby's residence in the house as a blemish on its record of distinguished inhabitants. Whereas other occupants receive chapter titles such as "American Hero" and "Statesmen of the Lost Cause," she refers to his occupancy as "The Gadsby Interval" as though it was a pause in the home's noble history. Beale also claims that Gadsby "invaded the select circles of Washington society" when he purchased the house. By discussing Gadsby as a slave trader, Beale provided additional proof that he was unworthy of Decatur House. While several newspaper articles mention the house's slave past, it is likely that they got this information from Beale's book and not a tour.⁴⁹ In fact, the Gadsby addition, an unimpressive and utilitarian structure, was probably not part of this initial tour but instead served as badly needed office and storage space for the National Trust.

The history of Decatur House is also emblematic of the National Trust's efforts to physically preserve historic places. Soon after the National Trust acquired Decatur House, it became involved in efforts to save the house's location, Lafayette Square, from

⁴⁸ Marie Beale, *Decatur House and Its Inhabitants* (Washington D.C., National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1954), 51.

⁴⁹ See for example: "Old Decatur House will be Preserved," *The New York Times*, 2 May 1953, 17, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2001).

the federal government's plans to raze several historic buildings in order to make room for the expanding government bureaucracy. In the original plan for the construction, the government planned to seize nine plots of land on Jackson Place in order to make room for the office building, leaving only the historic Decatur House, Blair, and Blair-Lee Homes. Plans for the bureaucratically titled "Federal Office Building Number 7" caused immediate protest.⁵⁰ One occupant of a condemned property maintained that "Decatur House and Blair House will be just funny-looking little niches in a modern monolith. They might as well go, too." New Jersey Representative Frank Thompson Jr. charged the Eisenhower administration with having "less real interest or concern" than any other administration with historic preservation and saw this project as the first of many such projects that would inevitably alter historic Washington: "It will now be only a matter of time before this remarkable park [Lafayette Park] going back to the early days of our country will be changed beyond recognition...[Federal Office Building Number 7] will inevitably lead to a huge office building on the east side...Then, there will come a demand for a parking garage..."⁵¹ Other commentaries on the project showed that Americans still shared a romantic view of American history and a limited sense of which contemporary Americans were worth consideration in federal policy decisions. An editorial in *The Washington Post* expressed these views in the context of the particular uses of history during the Cold War:

⁵⁰ "Lawmakers Protest Plan for Lafayette Square Office," *The Washington Post and Times Herald* (1954-1959), 21 Feb 1957, B1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1977-1988).

⁵¹ "Capital Plagued by Old Buildings," *New York Times* (1857-Current file), 10 Mar 1957, 73, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851-2001); "Lawmakers Protest Plan for Lafayette Sq. Office," *The Washington Post and Times Herald* (1954-1959), 21 Feb 1957, B1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

Jackson Place long ago lost its residential character, yet sufficient traces remain to stir memories of the era when elegant carriages rolled down Pennsylvania Avenue and hoop skirts still swirled in Lafayette Park. We suppose it is inevitable that the expanding Federal City must of necessity trample many graceful remnants of a quieter past. Is it too much to hope, though, that the planners will take another look for some slums or architectural atrocities that could better be sacrificed than the still attractive structures on Jackson Place? John Dos Passos once wrote, wisely, ‘In times of change and danger, when there is a quicksand of fear under men’s reasoning, a sense of continuity with generations gone before can stretch like a lifeline across the scary present.’⁵²

The National Trust entered into this debate early in the process. The Trust decided not to oppose the plan in its entirety because the historic integrity of Jackson Place had already been compromised by private building projects. Instead, Trust officials offered an alternative plan whereby the government would restore several other historic mansions on the street and use them to house visiting dignitaries. Richard H. Howland, president of the National Trust, urged that these mansions would provide an “effective counterpart” to Decatur House. Additionally, Howland asked that the new building “reflect the original concept of Lafayette Square” with a façade that mirrored Decatur House’s in scale and design.⁵³ The building project was plagued by continuous public outcry and a formal “Save Lafayette Square” movement throughout the Eisenhower administration. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy put into motion plans to meld the federal government’s needs for office space with the equally pressing need for historic preservation when he selected architects John Carl Warnecke and Associates to redesign the Lafayette Square project and landscape Lafayette Park. The National Trust endorsed

⁵² “Sands of Time,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1854-1959)*, 4 Feb 1957, A12, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

⁵³ Mulloy, 51; Jean White, “Plan Offered to Save Homes of Lafayette Square,” *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1954-1959)*, 2 Mar 1957, B1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

the end result of Warnecke's design, which retained many of the historical buildings and reconstructed townhouses in place of the modern office buildings along the street. The taller federal offices were built behind the existing and reconstructed structures. In this way, Lafayette Square blended modern needs with a preservation ethic. While some critics likened the buildings to a movie set, the project also was seen more favorably as "a face-lifting" for Lafayette Square to "restore its youth of 100 years ago."⁵⁴

New Social History, Black History, and the Search For a New Narrative

The imperatives of the new social history would eventually lead to sweeping changes at both the National Park Service and National Trust for Historic Preservation. Initially however, both of these organizations were conservative in their interpretation and implementation of this new history.

The initial integration of social history into the national parks was spurred by MISSION 66, a government program that infused funding into the National Park Service for much needed maintenance and expansion of the parks' physical and interpretive environments. In part, MISSION 66 funds were an answer to the popularity of the parks, which had overtaxed their staffs and structures. As historian Bernard de Voto noted in 1953, "So much of the priceless heritage which the Service must safeguard for the United States is beginning to go to hell." He continued, "There are not enough rangers to protect either the scenic areas from the depredations of tourists or the tourists from the consequences of their own carelessness – or to gather up the litter or to collect all the

⁵⁴ Nancy L. Ross, "Reconstructing the Past Along Jackson Place," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, 5 Sep 1970, E1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877-1988).

entrance fees that should be paid.”⁵⁵ In natural and historic parks, MISSION 66 funding was used to modernize accommodations for visitors, improve roads and safety measures, increase educational interpretation, and hire new staff. As outlined in a Cabinet meeting with President Eisenhower, MISSION 66 was also an investment in American patriotism:

To put the National Parks in shape is an investment in the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of Americans as individuals. It is a gainful investment contributing substantially to the national economy...It is an investment in good citizenship. Where else do so many Americans under the most pleasant circumstances come face to face with their Government? Where else but on historic ground can they better renew the idealism that prompted the patriots to their deeds of valor? Where else but in the great out-of-doors as God made it can we better recapture the spirit and something of the qualities of the pioneers? Pride in their Government, love of the land, and faith in the American Tradition – these are the real products of the national parks.⁵⁶

While the Park Service administration advocated for MISSION 66 as a way to further the American tradition of patriots and pioneers, the new social historians’ alternate way of thinking about history seeped into the interpretations. The National Park Service quickly appropriated social historical ideas such as expanding the definition of history by examining everyday people and altering the traditional historical chronology away from the standard benchmarks of Presidential elections and military campaigns. At Manassas Battlefield National Park, the World War II era exhibits, with their focus on military maneuvers and battlefield commanders, were still in place in the 1960s. When MISSION 66 funding came through, the administrative team at Manassas designed a new exhibit plan to modernize the museum. Although unique administrative delays hampered

⁵⁵ Bernard de Voto, “Let’s Close the National Parks,” *Harper’s Magazine* October 1953, 49-52, quoted in Dilsaver, 186-187.

⁵⁶ “MISSION 66 Special Presentation to President Eisenhower and the Cabinet by Director Conrad Wirth,” National Park Service Archives, Harpers Ferry, General Collection Box A8213, Folder entitled, “Cabinet Meeting, Mission 66 Presentation, January 27, 1956,” quoted in Dilsaver 195-196.

the integration of the new interpretation into Manassas's exhibits, the late 1960s witnessed a variety of changes at the battlefield park.⁵⁷ In 1968, planning began to give traditional military history at the visitor center a new look with up-to-date audiovisual resources that would explain the battlefield tactics at both First and Second Manassas. Other exhibits gave the park's material culture artifacts, which had been described as one of the "shoddiest collections of mementos" ever seen by previous visitors, more historical resonance.⁵⁸ At Manassas, the many different uniforms that average soldiers wore became an entrée into discussion about confusion on the battlefield. Other displays showed the items that soldiers carried in their knapsacks. This focus on the average soldier was heightened by the introduction of an audio narrative for one of the site's walking tours. The narrative featured the voices of a northern and southern soldier who each described the battles as if they were at a reunion fifty years later.⁵⁹

Manassas's new interpretation had several effects. First, the clever audio tour allowed the Park Service to examine and celebrate the separate experiences of the North and South while still making sectional reconciliation the focus of the tour. More importantly however, the new exhibits used material culture artifacts as a way to examine the life of the average soldier. In this way, Manassas's interpretation reflected changing ways of thinking about artifacts. The first generation of museums had viewed historical

⁵⁷ See Zenzen, Chapter 6 for a discussion of the delays that personnel problems, specifically Park Superintendent Francis Wilshin caused at Manassas. Wilshin, an ineffective administrator and distracted historian, forfeited much of Manassas' funding by failing to implement necessary improvements at the park.

⁵⁸ Howard Baker to William Hauser, 13 March 1964, and attached letter from Hauser to Stewart L. Udall, 28 February, 1964, and William Everhart to Chief, Eastern Museum Laboratory, 11 May 1965, "Manassas Planning Meeting," both in Exhibit File Manassas, NPS Historic Photographic Collection, quoted in Zenzen, 74.

⁵⁹ Zenzen, 76, 83.

artifacts as self-explanatory. The artifacts were history and their import came from their authenticity as old items that belonged to or represented the belongings of important persons. With the advent of social history and an interest in everyday life, artifacts became important for what they could tell Americans about life in the past. How the item was used, by whom, and to what effect, became essential questions. This change was reflected in living history exhibits at sites such as Colonial Williamsburg, which will be discussed later, and in the interpretation at Manassas. These first tentative steps into social history would be expanded in the coming years as the National Park Service moved to the forefront of narrative inclusion.

Just as MISSION 66 funding spurred the National Park Service's initial foray into social history at Manassas, federal spending also led the National Trust to expand its definition of history. The previous acquisitions of the National Trust - Woodlawn Plantation, Decatur House, eighteenth-century Virginia plantation Belle Grove, and Tarrytown, New York's, Lyndhurst mansion - all represented elite architecture and families. This changed when the National Trust acquired the Pope-Leighey house, which was threatened by the federal government's plans to route Interstate 66 through Falls Church, Virginia. The Pope-Leighey house acquisition was a moderate step into preserving the history of the average American. The home was a twentieth-century middle-class residence of only 1,300 feet but its significance came from the fact that it was designed by famed American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright's fascination with the prospect of designing a functional and attractive home for the average American led him to create a series of homes that he called "Usonia."

The Pope-Leighey house, which was commissioned by Loren B. Pope, was the second home that Wright built for the Usonia series. Its innovative design made the most of the home's four main rooms and created an illusion of space despite its small size. The National Trust describes the home saying, "the use of rough cypress and brick, inside and out, and the expanses of glass incorporated into the design help make the home blend organically into its natural setting. Built-in furniture, also designed by Wright, makes maximum use of every square foot."⁶⁰ Because Wright's design was tailored to the specific environment of its original Falls Church setting, the National Trust had a difficult time deciding where to relocate the house, eventually settling on the grounds of Woodlawn, in Mount Vernon, Virginia. The Pope-Leighey house was opened to the public in 1965. The fact that a national preservation organization acquired a recent and modest structure such as the Pope-Leighey house expanded the definition of "historic" beyond the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century homes that were associated with great Americans and made architectural uniqueness a worthy cause for preservation.⁶¹ In this way, the National Trust reflected broader changes in historical thinking. In addition, by interpreting this home to the public, the National Trust also moved the public celebration of American history beyond the elite to reflect a broader cross-section of the American population.

By the 1970s, however, social history had not had an impact on the National Park Service sites that commemorated black Americans, the George Washington Carver National Monument in Missouri and the Booker T. Washington National Monument in

⁶⁰ Mulloy, 56.

⁶¹ Mulloy, 58.

Virginia. A brief survey of the interpretations at the Carver and Washington Memorials shows that the National Park Service failed to use them to examine the uglier sides of American history.

When the Park Service acquired the birthplace of George Washington Carver in 1943, it became the first site in the National Park Service honoring an African American. The interpretation at the monument was hampered both by the physical shortcomings of the site, where no buildings from Carver's first few years as a slave child existed, and the gaps in historical knowledge about Carver himself. In order to provide more solid backing for the interpretation, the National Park Service hired two scientists to review Carver's scientific achievements. This 1960 study only created more problems for the Park Service when the scientists concluded that Carver's greatest achievement, his discovery of multiple uses for peanuts, could not be substantiated. In Park Service administrators' minds, the climate of the civil rights movement added even more complications to the Carver interpretation:

While Professors [William R.] Carroll and [Merle K.] Muhrer are very careful to emphasize Carver's excellent qualities, their realistic appraisal of his 'scientific contributions,' which loom so large in the Carver legend, is information which must be handled very carefully as far as outsiders are concerned. To put it plainly, it seem *{sic}* to us that individuals or organizations who are inclined to be rather militant in their approach to racial relationships might take offense at a study which superficially purports to lessen Dr. Carver's stature...Our present thinking is that the report should not be published, at least in its present form, simply to avoid any possible misunderstanding.⁶²

⁶² William R. Carroll and Merle A. Muhrer, "The Scientific Contributions of George Washington Carver," unpublished report, 1962, quoted in Mackintosh, "Historical Challenges;" memorandum Regional Director Howard W. Baker to Director, Feb. 21, 1962, History Division quoted in Mackintosh, "Historical Challenges."

In what Park Service administrators saw as in the interest of racial peace and historical accuracy, the interpretation at the George Washington Carver National Monument focused on Carver's inspirational life and not his scientific discoveries. The 1984 brochure illustrates this interpretation: "It is not so much his specific achievements as the humane philosophy behind them that define the man."⁶³

In addition, a 1973 analysis of living history interpretations in National Park Service sites revealed that the Booker T. Washington National Monument offered a misleading interpretation of Washington's early life and slavery in general. The monument was situated on the site of Washington's boyhood home, a small Virginia plantation where he was a slave. In the early 1970s, the museum operated as a working farm, with period demonstrations and costumed interpreters. The park's bucolic living history demonstrations were apparently divorced from any substantive discussion of slavery. In 1973, a Park Service interpretive specialist expressed concern about the interpretation of the Booker T. Washington monument with arguments that predicted later discussions of slavery and museums: "The Booker T. Washington farm comes out as a charming scene, of course, complete with farm animals with picturesque names, with almost no indication of the social environmental realities of slave life (indeed, how far can you go with 'living slavery'?)." ⁶⁴

⁶³ Mackintosh, "Historical Challenges;" A 1990 Park Service study completed by historian Richard Miller used this interpretation to point out the latent racism extant in the Park Service of the 1990s. He found the interpretation at the Carver monument and the Park Service's decision to abandon the folklore around Carver's scientific achievements as contrary to the NPS's treatment of white honorees and a "back-handed slap at a racial hero, delivered by the NPS." See Richard Miller, "The National Park Service and the Afro-American Experience, 1990: An Independent Assessment from the Black Perspective," Folder: African-American Issues," National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁴ Mackintosh, "Historical Challenges."

The interpretive shortcomings at the George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington National Monuments were part of a larger NPS-wide neglect of black history in general, and the particular history of slavery in America. By the 1970s, the Park Service recognized that as the steward of the nation's historic and natural resources, it had the responsibility to "define a National Park System that is balanced and complete in its representation of the Nation's historical heritage." To this end, in 1971, the National Park Service took a step in making its parks reflect the racial diversity of the American people by issuing a call for "assistance in upgrading the commemoration of Negro History in Americas." This prospectus resulted in a meeting of twenty leading scholars of African American history. Organized by the National Park Service and the Afro-American Bicentennial Corp. (ABC), a nonprofit group that aimed at including African Americans in the nation's bicentennial celebrations, the meeting recognized the shortcomings of Park Service historic sites and resolved "that support should be given to the incorporation of the Black experience in the National Park Service Program for upgrading historical commemoration in the National Park System." To facilitate this, the ABC would conduct a three year "nationwide study of historic places which involve black Americans in United States history" and propose new sites for designation as National Historic Landmarks.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ "Beyond the Fireworks of '76: A Summary Report of Thirty Sites Determined to be Significant in Illustrating and Commemorating the Role of Black Americans in United States History, Report 1, December, 1973," ii, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.; "Beyond the Fireworks of '76: Summary Report on a Three Year Study by the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation of Sites Determined to be Significant in Illustrating the Role of Afro-Americans in United States History, Report 3, 1976," 5, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.; "In Search of Black History," *Chicago Daily Defender (Big Weekend Edition)* (1966-1973), 9 Sep 1972, 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Chicago Defender.

In addition to recommending sites for inclusion in the National Park System, the ABC's report offered a critical review of the Park Service's interpretation of African American historic sites. The previously mentioned George Washington Carver and Booker T. Washington sites, along with a Frederick Douglass museum, were the only landmarks "related directly through identification and, most importantly, through interpretation to the history of Afro-Americans" that were owned and operated by the Park Service. In 1974, with the designation of the Tuskegee National Historic Park, this number increased to four. Additionally, between 1935, when the National Historic Landmarks Program was established, and 1970, 1,000 sites had been given landmark status. Only one of these landmarks, the Paul Laurence Dunbar House in Dayton, Ohio, commemorated African American history.⁶⁶

The ABC's report linked the paucity of African American parks and landmarks to biases within the Park Service's themes and criteria for evaluating sites of historic interest. These criteria included:

1. Structures or sites associated with events that have made a significant contribution to...our American heritage.
2. Structure or sites associated importantly with persons of national significance.
3. Structures associated significantly with an important event that outstandingly represents some great idea or ideal
4. Structures that embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen.
5. Objects that figured prominently in nationally significant events; or that were associated with nationally significant persons.
6. Archeological sites that have produced information of a major scientific importance...

⁶⁶ "Beyond the Fireworks of '76: Summary Report on a Three Year Study by the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation of Sites Determined to be Significant in Illustrating the Role of Afro-Americans in United States History, Report 3, 1976," 4, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

7. Historic buildings not sufficiently significant individually may collectively compose a 'historic district' that is of historical significance to the Nation⁶⁷

The Park Service's participation in the ABC study and desire to create a more inclusive vision of American history demonstrates that the organization already had broadened its understanding of "our American heritage" and "nationally significant events" to include African American history. The desire to acquire or give landmark status only to sites with obvious historic integrity, as defined by the preservation of original details and association with prominent Americans, put these same African American sites at a disadvantage, however. As the report points out, "Afro-Americans, in common with several other ethnic minorities in the United States, have few historic sites with physical remains because of two factors – slavery and racism." The NPS criteria's bias towards originality was "discriminatory...making it extremely difficult to qualify those sites which are directly associated with the Afro-American contribution to the history and development of this country." The report concluded its discussion of the problems of the NPS criteria by pointing out an issue that would vex museums for the next thirty years. It stated, "The opportunity for material success has not been, and is not now, equal for all American people. It is therefore, grossly unfair to operate a system of historic commemoration that is biased towards material things. Such a system perpetuates, rather than seeks to rectify, the inequities of the past." The ABC argued that social history should be included alongside political, military, and architectural history as way to

⁶⁷ "Beyond the Fireworks of '76: Summary Report on a Three Year Study by the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation of Sites Determined to be Significant in Illustrating the Role of Afro-Americans in United States History, Report 3, 1976," 2, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

broaden the criteria and allow for the preservation of sites such as black churches which, while not architecturally, politically, or militarily significant, were extremely important in their parishioners' lives.⁶⁸

The ABC's report also found that the Park Service's thematic taxonomy for organizing its sites did not reflect African American history. Within this taxonomy, each park and historic landmark was categorized by themes and subthemes that highlight different aspects of American history. Upon first glance, these themes offered a variety of opportunities to talk about black history including, "Theme 3 – Development of the English Colonies," "Theme 4 – Major American Wars," "Theme 5 – Political and Military Affairs," "Theme 6 – Westward Expansion," "Theme 7 – America at Work," "Theme 8 – The Contemplative Society," and "Theme 9 – Society and Social Conscience." Two examples will serve to illustrate the limited ways in which these themes were defined prior to 1970. First, the ABC found that in its exploration of the military history of the United States (themes 4 and 5), only the history of white military operations and political occurrences were commemorated and "the role of non-whites in America's wars, her politics, and diplomacy, has not been explored in these sites the NPS has studied and commemorated for their importance to American history." Using the battlefields of the Civil War as examples, researchers at the ABC argued that black history was purposely excluded from Park Service military sites saying, "It is not possible that 205,000 to 209,000 black men who fought with the Union Army during the Civil

⁶⁸ "Beyond the Fireworks of '76: A Summary Report of Thirty Sites Determined to be Significant in Illustrating and Commemorating the Role of Black Americans in United States History, Report 1, December, 1973," 59-61, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C

War, could have been so consistently overlooked by mistake.” The ABC concluded, “Once again there seems to have been the assumption that once the white role in the war, diplomatic, or political event has been established, American history has been told.”⁶⁹

Perhaps even more significant was the fact that under the theme “America at Work,” there was no mention of slavery. Instead, the subtheme for that topic lists the “historical practices and techniques of farming” including “plantation agriculture since 1607.” The ABC categorized this taxonomy as “side-stepping” slavery and as demonstrating “a marked reluctance on the part of the NPS to openly deal with some of the less appealing aspects of American history, especially slavery.”⁷⁰ It was one facet of what the ABC characterized as the “ethnocentric” taxonomy of the National Park Service. Overall, the ABC concluded that the NPS criterion for identifying and interpreting sites was “organized to cover American history from a white American’s perspective. With the exception of Indian Americans, non-European ethnic groups are treated in sub-themes, and facets of sub-themes; that is to say, afterthoughts to the main focus of concern that is white American history.”⁷¹

The National Park Service was not alone in its neglect of African American history, however. Within the academic community, Kenneth Stampp’s *The Peculiar*

⁶⁹ “Beyond the Fireworks of ’76: A Summary Report of Thirty Sites Determined to be Significant in Illustrating and Commemorating the Role of Black Americans in United States History, Report 1, December, 1973,” 5, 58, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁰ “Beyond the Fireworks of ’76: A Summary Report of Thirty Sites Determined to be Significant in Illustrating and Commemorating the Role of Black Americans in United States History, Report 1, December, 1973,” 58, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

⁷¹ “Beyond the Fireworks of ’76: A Summary Report of Thirty Sites Determined to be Significant in Illustrating and Commemorating the Role of Black Americans in United States History, Report 1, December, 1973,” 5, 58, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

Institution had ignited new social historians' study of slavery in 1956 but major works such as Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* and Edmund Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom* were only just emerging at the time of the report.⁷² Additionally, black history was almost entirely absent from public history. The ABC report noted that the researchers had some difficulty in identifying African American history sites because "it is not possible to consult books on historic Afro-American buildings or pamphlets...outlining walking tours of historic Afro-American sites in various cities." As was the case at many sites like Mount Vernon and Colonial Williamsburg, African American history was often not interpreted even when it existed within a historic site. The ABC's work required the use of maps, property records, wills, directories, and numerous primary documents.⁷³ Despite these research challenges, by 1977, the ABC study resulted in the designation of 61 new National Historic Landmarks including the homes of historians Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Du Bois and musicians Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. Some of the more radical of the ABC's suggestions, such as a site associated with Nat Turner, were not included in the final list of historic landmarks.⁷⁴

The critical assessment of the National Park Service's system of designating and interpreting new historic landmarks and parks was underscored by a complementary

⁷² See Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Random House, 1956), Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) and Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975).

⁷³ "Beyond the Fireworks of '76: A Summary Report of Thirty Sites Determined to be Significant in Illustrating and Commemorating the Role of Black Americans in United States History, Report 1, December, 1973", 5, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁴ "Six Historical Sites Are Named" *The Washington Post* (1974-Current file), 18 Mar 1977, B4, ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post.

study conducted by a research team from Howard University. This 1978 study examined different aspects of Park Service programming including the resources available to document African American history, the effectiveness of interpretations of black heritage, and the quality of the interpretive staff. The report made recommendations about how specific sites could connect with the broader African American community and improve their programming for African American history.

In the view of the Howard research team, the new social history had created a space to examine African American history. They expressed the influence of social historical studies about average Americans: “When American history is perceived and celebrated in terms of the lives and activities of ordinary people, rather than those of the political and social elites, then the black presence partakes of the character of that of the American people in general and should be appreciated as such.” Echoing the sentiments of the ABC who argued for the inclusion of social history in the National Park Service taxonomy, the Howard team expressed their belief that a social historical approach could help to locate black Americans within the nation’s existing parks. They used battlefield parks as an example: “When...historians balance their treatment of America’s wars with accounts of the deeds of the common soldier as well those of the military and political leaders, when they discuss not only campaign strategy...but also the day-to day activities...then blacks are likely to appear in these accounts”⁷⁵

The Howard team identified several problems with existing Park Service efforts to include black history in their interpretations. First, the black experience appeared only

⁷⁵ Research Team, Howard University, “The Afro-American Presence at Selected National Parks,” 1-3, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

intermittently in most Park Service interpretations. The Howard team pointed out that African Americans had been so thoroughly absent from the national narrative that they had disappeared from people's concept of history: "Because most white Americans are not sensitized to include blacks in events where they are not specifically identified, it becomes [n]ecessary that the exhibit and narrative be mutually reinforcing." To underscore the presence of black Americans within the nation's history, the report argued that they should be featured in a variety of roles in visual exhibits, interpreter tours, and living history demonstrations. Ironically, this recommendation was complicated by the fact that at least at some sites, the intermittent presentation of black history made African Americans unenthusiastic about being employed at the parks. Petersburg National Battlefield, for example, had a difficult time employing black rangers, despite the proximity of Virginia State College, a historically black school. The Howard team interviewed several former employees who believed that park officials actually were not interested in employing black interpreters because "the primary function [was] maintaining and glorifying the image of the Confederacy...and that blacks have no heritage in the park's history. Students also [did] not want to become the park's token negro in such a negative setting."⁷⁶

Perhaps the most important conclusion to come out of the Howard University report called for a change in the definition of authenticity at Park Service sites. Both the Howard and ABC reports urged the Park Service to move away from interpretations that revolved around battlefield relics and perfectly mapped maneuvers to ones that favored a

⁷⁶ Research Team, Howard University, "The Afro-American Presence at Selected National Parks," 255, 7, 181, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

realistic narrative of the site's history. The Howard report acknowledged that in many sites, particularly those that dealt with oppression, this would be a difficult task: "Racial prejudice is a theme that many find unpalatable" and "must be handled with great sensitiveness." In cases where the site's history called for a potentially "unpalatable" interpretation, "parks should rely on historical authenticity without concern for how a given community may react. Fear of possible white reaction against programs depicting blacks as heroes or black protest against their roles as slaves should not prevent the presentation of activities clearly supported by the evidence."⁷⁷ This statement from the Howard team also exemplifies the limited place of African Americans within most Americans' concept of history. In 1978, when this study was completed, the Howard team assumed that black and white audiences would be mutually disinterested, and in fact offended, by presentations of African Americans in certain historical roles. For white audiences, depictions of black Americans in roles that ran counter to stereotypes were targeted while black audiences rejected seeing African Americans in roles that seemed to reinforce those same stereotypes.

This feeling was not unique to the Howard team and in fact, reflected the sentiment at some National Park Service sites. For example, the Howard team asserted that the interpretation at Fort Davis, a nineteenth-century Texas military post, was hindered by the small number of black visitors at the park. The team's analysis of Fort Davis's interpretation and audience connected the problems of presenting black and white histories to different audiences with the imperative of aiming for an accurate

⁷⁷ Research Team, Howard University, "The Afro-American Presence at Selected National Parks", 256, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

narrative. They stated that “This view [that only black audiences care about black history] assumes that the history of the fort should be shaped by the nature of the visitation. An accurate picture is accurate regardless of the audience. This view also assumes that only black visitors are interested in or need to be aware of the black presence.”⁷⁸ Ironically, however, some of the Howard team’s recommendations for creating a more inclusive history reinforced the belief that African American history is primarily for African American people. At Louisiana’s Chalmette National Historic Park, for example, the Howard team worked with the New Orleans school system, which was 80-85% African American, to build a program that would focus on the black experience at Chalmette Battlefield. This was in response to a district administrator’s assertion that “he had seen Chalmette National Historic Park and felt that the park had little visually to offer the black student.”⁷⁹ To be fair, the Howard team’s outreach to places like New Orleans was part of their overall plan to increase the minority presence at National Park Service sites both as visitors and in historical exhibits and narratives. In some cases, however, their methods reinforced the segregation of the national narrative

⁷⁸ Research Team, Howard University, “The Afro-American Presence at Selected National Parks,” 92, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C. The National Park Service staff at Fort Davis responded angrily to the Howard University study and attacked much of its interpretation of Fort Davis, including the staff’s belief that only black audiences are interested in black history, as biased and inaccurate. See Robert I. Kerr to Associate Director, Management and Operations, WASO, “Howard University Study, ‘Afro-American History Interpretation in National Parks,’” 5, Folder UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C. The Howard University team’s observation about the link between black audiences and interpretation was supported by findings at other parks however, including Chalmette National Historic Park where the lack of discussion of blacks was linked to the possibility that “the visitor is not interested” (p. 115) and by the 1990 study by Richard Miller. See Richard Miller, “The National Park Service and the Afro-American Experience, 1990: An Independent Assessment from the Black Perspective,” 27, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁹ Research Team, Howard University, “The Afro-American Presence at Selected National Parks,” 119, Folder: UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

into American history and African American history and undercut their attempts to create a unified vision of the American experience at National Park Service sites.

Both the Afro-American Bicentennial Commission study and the Howard University study are useful examples of the Park Service's early attempts to incorporate African American history into its programming and had concrete effects on the depiction of American history at Park Service sites and landmarks. The ABC study, as we have seen, led to the designation, and thus preservation, of ninety historic landmarks associated with African American history. The Howard study, on the other hand, held existing parks responsible for their African American interpretations and suggested concrete examples of how those parks could create a more inclusive history.

The ABC and Howard University studies represented concrete steps towards creating a more inclusive national history but they were incomplete because they only peripherally addressed the issue of slavery in National Park Service historic sites and battlefield parks. A 1990 Park Service memo shows that more than a decade after the ABC and Howard team completed these studies, the Park Service still had a significant amount of work to do when it came to interpreting African American history in general, and slavery, in particular. Reflecting on plans for yet another study by Richard Miller in 1990, an Interior Department administrator commented, "If [Miller's study] is to result in any real change, then the entire framework of interpretive programming at park sites must be taken into consideration." The memo continues, noting several problems with existing Park Service interpretation. These problems include the limited knowledge of park rangers, many of whom were not historians and received on the job training in

interpretation through site handouts and secondary literature. This method of training resulted in site specific interpretations because the interpreters were “unprepared, therefore, to place the history of the site in a larger context.” This became an even bigger problem when one considered “complex issues such as slavery” because “the broad context of African-American history is not a framework readily available to them, let alone the many schools of thought...on this topic over the years.” The integration of new content would therefore mean developing intensive training sessions for park interpreters.⁸⁰

The lack of historical context for park interpretations could be addressed by training sessions but the other two problems with the Park Service’s approach to American history required more nuanced solutions. First, the memo noted that “due to the lack of sufficient efforts to employ African-American and other minority employees,” it was likely that “white rangers [would give] talks on Black history, not only to white visitors but to black visitors.” The memo noted that “this is not a problem per se” but then acknowledged that “preparation and skill” were required “where controversial or sensitive issues are involved, which is the case not only with slavery but with many topics relating to the history of African-Americans in this country.” The memo indicates that in order to make their interpretations less controversial, the Park Service felt that their information and tours had to be above reproach and therefore advocated for “as wide a range of expertise...as possible in crafting the interpretive programming at various

⁸⁰ Marilyn Nickels, Interagency Resources Division to Ben Levy, History Division, “Study by Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development, 7/9/90,” 2, UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

sites.” Additionally, the Park Service felt that “consideration must be given to diverse views in the interpretation of American history.”⁸¹

This Department of the Interior memo indicates that the Park Service of 1990 was still hesitant in its approach to slavery. The earliest examples of African American history in the parks were the sites associated with George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington, and Frederick Douglass. Black history then found its way into military parks that began interpreting the exploits of black soldiers. These examples show that the Park Service was most willing to integrate African American history into its programming when the organization could celebrate the achievements of black Americans. In this way, the Park Service’s early African American programming celebrated black heroes the same way that the early preservation movement celebrated white heroes.

As this memo shows, however, the NPS’s approach to slavery was much more tentative and uncertain. By 1990, historians had completed enough studies of slavery that the fundamental horror of the system had ceased to be “controversial” academically. The Park Service memo made reference to this fact in speaking about the work of Dr. Hayward Farrar, who presented a paper on slavery at a Park Service meeting, as “one which many historians would consider extremely conservative and would argue with” but still felt that the interpretive planning had to include “acknowledgement of this broad range of perspectives.”⁸² This tentative approach to African American history and

⁸¹ Marilyn Nickels, Interagency Resources Division to Ben Levy, History Division, “Study by Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development, 7/9/90,” 2, UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

⁸² Marilyn Nickels, Interagency Resources Division to Ben Levy, History Division, “Study by Afro-American Institute for Historic Preservation and Community Development, 7/9/90,” 2, UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

slavery is also evident in the sheer number of reports that black historians completed on behalf of the National Park Service and the concern over white rangers interpreting black history at the parks. Taken together, these facts indicated that the Park Service's concern over controversy and perspective was not related to the history of slavery but instead, was related to the relationships between contemporary black and white Americans. Given the Park Service's charge to interpret history for all Americans, this was a serious concern.

As the reactions to some of the Park Service's forays into the interpretation of slavery indicate, administrators may have been correct in assuming that contemporary Americans would not agree on the place of slavery in the national narrative. Indeed, even those Americans who agreed on the necessity of discussing slavery in the national parks could not agree on the terms to use for the discussion. A heated memo exchange between historian Richard Miller and Senior Park Service Historian Ben Levy exemplifies this fact. In response to Levy's editorial suggestion that "Afro-American" be replaced with "African American" in the final version of Miller's report for the NPS, Miller drafted an angry reply entitled, "Nation Time": On Descriptive Terminology and Style." Miller stated,

I am as yet unaware of any official policy of the NPS in this regard [African American versus Afro-American], and must conclude that it is quite presumptuous of the editor to express any opinion.

In addition, his comment that 'African' is not a nationality (after I characterized it as such in comparison to the usage of 'Black' as a race) was most out of place and calls for a measured response. Obviously, black is a color and Africa is a continent. So what! As I recall, it was in the 1960s that we successfully asserted (at long last) our right to decide what to call ourselves. Apparently, we are engaged in a new round of the same old word game, and – personal misgivings about the ascending choices aside – it is also apparent that one ground rule needs to be re-stated, i.e.: some folks are not allowed to play.

In response to Miller's memo, Levy expressed that he "was startled by the intensity of Richard Miller's reaction to my annotations of the text of his evaluation." He continued, "In recommending the use of 'African American' as a substitute for 'Afro-American' I was passing on a suggestion based upon several comments made to me by Black intellectuals in the sense that this is the current academic usage. In other words, I was trying to avoid, not encourage, offense."⁸³ It is likely that this exchange did nothing to quell any National Park Service fears about the national reaction to their new interpretations.

It was perhaps because of some of these fears that the Park Service's use of Miller's study was characteristically conservative. Asserting that Miller was an expert in military history, Chief Historian Edward Bearss stated that Miller was "better able to analyze, evaluate, and make substantive recommendations as to how the NPS can better incorporate and enhance interpretation of Black-related history at a number of Service cultural sites, focusing on the political, economic and social experience of Black America, but particularly on military history in a broad context." Bearss continued, "strongly endors[ing]" several of Miller's recommendations. Virtually all of Bearss's endorsements focused on the military experience of black Americans in the Civil War.⁸⁴

The inclusion of the black military experience in the nation's battlefields proceeded without any apparent controversy but this was not the case when the Park Service decided to discuss slavery as a cause of the war at Civil War military sites.

⁸³ Ben Levy to Robert a. DeForrest Feb. 5, 1991, 1-2, UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁴ Chief Historian Edward Bearss to Senior Historian Ben Levy, July 2, 1991, p. 1, UGRR and Af Am Studies, National Park Service Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

The push to include slavery in discussions of the causes of the Civil War in the nation's battlefields was not a result of Park Service initiatives but instead, was the work of Chicago Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. who inserted language into an Interior appropriations bill stating that Civil War battle sites are "often not placed in the proper historical context." Park Service administrators perhaps were not entirely to blame for this omission. Before Jackson's appropriation bill forced the issue, the Secretary of the Interior received over 1,000 letters demanding the dismissal of the Superintendent of Gettysburg when he mentioned slavery as the cause of the Civil War.⁸⁵ Despite this ominous sign, Jackson's language spurred a National Park Service report on the interpretation of battlefield sites that clearly exemplified the lack of discussion about slavery within the system. Congress then gave the Park Service a clear task: "To encourage Civil War battle sites to recognize and include in all of their public displays and multimedia educational presentations the unique role that the institution of slavery played in causing the Civil War."⁸⁶

National Park Service Chief Historian Dwight Pitcaithley recalled in an issue of the American Historical Association's *Perspectives* that when the Park Service's decision to start interpreting slavery in Civil War parks was made public, "The National Park Service was inundated with approximately 2,400 cards and letters from the Sons of Confederate Veterans, members of Civil War Roundtables, and the general public."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Karen Kinzey, interview by author, author's notes, Arlington, VA., August 11, 2005.

⁸⁶ Bruce Babbitt, foreword to *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War* [book on-line] ed. Robert K. Sutton (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National, 2001, accessed 14 September 2008); available from http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/rthg/fore.htm; Internet.

⁸⁷ Dwight T. Pitcaithley, "Public Education and the National Park Service: Interpreting the Civil War," *Perspectives*, November 2007 [journal on-line]; available from

For these portions of the American public, this decision indicated that the NPS had abandoned both its mission of interpreting American history and a large constituency of Americans in favor of political correctness. Pitcaithley recalls that many of the letters charged the NPS with “‘demonizing and slandering’ the South with its ‘new’ interpretation of the war” and using the battlefields as “South-bashing, hate-generating propaganda centers.” Additional letters characterized the addition of slavery as “some momentarily fashionable, politically correct, sensitive etc., ideology.”⁸⁸ For these letter-writers, the Park Service decision did not create a more inclusive history but instead, distorted their region’s history, their ancestors’ history, and the history of the nation. Members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans and other organizations felt abandoned and slandered by the Park Service’s new interpretation.

For the Park Service however, the decision to represent slavery as a cause of the Civil War did not mean that they were abandoning their mandate to preserve American history for the public. Instead, it represented their more complete embrace of their charge of interpreting American history.⁸⁹ Pitcaithley’s characterization of the decision to move forward with this interpretation despite these rather effusive protests indicates that by the

<http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2007/0711/0711pro2.cfm>; Internet; accessed 10 September 2008. See also Dwight T. Pitcaithley, “‘A Cosmic Threat’: The National Park Service Addresses the Causes of the American Civil War,” in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, eds. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006).

⁸⁸ Correspondence to Representative Frank Wolfe, January 17, 2000, Front Royal, Virginia in “Civil War General -2” file, Park History Subject Files, National Park Service, Washington, D.C., quoted in Pitcaithley.

⁸⁹ Individual sites still have a lot of latitude in planning their interpretations. Gary Nash writes about the plans to reinterpret Independence National Historic Park in Philadelphia in the 1990s. Though the site had a long history of slavery (George Washington’s slaves, among others, worked there), initial plans ignored this history in favor of a celebration of the Liberty Bell. Nash galvanized historians and the public to advocate for a more inclusive history. See Gary Nash, “For Whom Will the Liberty Bell Toll?,” in *Slavery and Public History* eds. James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006).

turn of the 21st century, the Park Service administrators were willing both to embrace the historical accuracy for which the ABC and Howard University studies had advocated in the 1970s and the controversy that would surround slavery interpretation:

The National Park Service has discovered that while a certain portion of the American public resists acknowledging the role of slavery in the coming of the Civil War, a larger percentage appreciate the directness and forthright interpretation...Engaging the tough subject of slavery has also made the NPS a better educational organization and its interpreters better educators. Public spaces are the ideal venues for the presentation of new and exciting historical information and interpretations. As a society, we cannot afford to let our federal agencies promote interpretations of the past that are no longer accepted by the scholarly community. We all have a role to play. Agencies like the National Park Service have an obligation to build strong and ongoing relationships with scholars and scholarly organizations and institutions, while scholars have an obligation to voice their concerns when they confront public interpretations of the past that are no longer historically correct...⁹⁰

By working in concert with academic historians to ensure that the Park Service exhibits represented the best scholarship on the Civil War and integrating those exhibits within traditional discussions of battlefield tactics, the NPS avoided the “interpretive apocalypse” that the letter writers predicted.⁹¹ More importantly however, the NPS’s actions represented the first instance of Service administrators standing up to controversy over the issue of slavery interpretation. In the coming years, two Park Service sites, Arlington House and Kingsley Plantation in Jacksonville, Florida, would build on this foundation.

⁹⁰ Dwight T. Pitcaithley, “Public Education and the National Park Service: Interpreting the Civil War,” *Perspectives*, November 2007 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2007/0711/0711pro2.cfm>; Internet; accessed 10 September 2008.

⁹¹ Dwight T. Pitcaithley, “Public Education and the National Park Service: Interpreting the Civil War,” *Perspectives*, November 2007 [journal on-line]; available from <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2007/0711/0711pro2.cfm>; Internet; accessed 10 September 2008.

Slave History in Action: Arlington House and Kingsley Plantation

The recent changes to the interpretation of Arlington House are particularly significant to this study for several reasons. First, Arlington House receives a large number of visitors each year due to its proximity to Arlington National Cemetery. Of the four to five million visitors that tour Arlington National Cemetery, 300,000 to 550,000 walk through the Lee mansion. In 2003, 363,353 visitors went through the house while in 2004, this number jumped to 419,511.⁹² The interpretation of Arlington House, therefore, reaches a large number of people. Additionally, because the house is not a “destination visit,” many tourists happen by it while visiting the cemetery on their own, taking the tourmobile through different tourist attractions within the cemetery, or as part of a general Washington, D.C. bus tour. This means that Arlington House likely reaches those visitors who normally would not seek out a historic house tour. Their time in the house and the distribution of the brochure are the only opportunity that public historians have to address these audiences.

The tour of Arlington House is also significant because the site’s history is interwoven with many difficult narratives of American history. Confiscated by the government and turned into a burial ground for the military and later a Freedmen’s village for former slaves, the house’s very preservation was a result of the sectional bitterness that accompanied the Civil War. Consecrated as a memorial to Robert E. Lee in 1955, the home’s current interpretation is a result of the Lost Cause veneration of Lee.

⁹² Karen Kinzey, interview by author, author’s notes, Arlington, VA., August 11, 2005; Kevin Strait, “Presenting Race and Slavery at Historic Sites: Arlington House, Robert E. Lee National Memorial,” [report on-line] (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service and Center for the Study of Public Culture and Public History at George Washington University, 2004, accessed 10 September 2005), 5; available from www.cr.nps.gov/crdi/Arlington_House_Survey.pdf; Internet.

Last, as a former plantation of the military commander of the Confederacy, the house's slave history has taken on particular importance.⁹³

Robert E. Lee himself still has meaning for a variety of groups such as Civil War enthusiasts, Confederate commemorative organizations, and African American groups. As recently as January, 2007 the bicentennial of Lee's birth was the occasion for both commemorations of the man and protests about his continued celebration in American culture. The Lee bicentennial was marked in a number of ways that exemplified Lee's polarizing force in American culture. For example, the Daughters of the Confederacy flew a Confederate flag on the Richmond statue of a rebel soldier. Elsewhere, during a debate on the place of Lee in modern history, an African American historian passed out a 1928 W.E.B. DuBois essay that characterized Lee as leading "a bloody war to perpetuate human slavery." The state government's participation in the bicentennial was notably limited to the creation of a small tourist brochure on Lee-related events. Though the Virginia General Assembly had planned to sponsor a number of events to commemorate Lee, including issuing license plates with his image, protests from African American delegates and the NAACP curtailed these plans. Several Lee-focused conferences were also planned around the Lee bicentennial, including one at Arlington House that asked, "Does Lee Matter?"⁹⁴

The staff at Arlington House knows that the answer to the question "Does Lee Matter?" is a resounding, "Yes." As the primary site associated with Robert E. Lee,

⁹³ The American Studies Department at The George Washington University makes a similar argument about the Lee House's connections in "Historical Interpretation and the National Park Service at Robert E. Lee National Memorial," 1, Arlington House files, Arlington, VA.

⁹⁴ Brigid Schulte, "Robert E. Lee, Version 200," *Washington Post*, 19 January 2007, B01.

Arlington House is subject to the same passions that characterized the Lee bicentennial. Over the past several years, juggling the wishes of a variety of different constituencies while maintaining the Park Service's mandate for historical accuracy has become increasingly difficult. Karen Kinzey noted several instances where word choice evoked a heated response from some visitors. The Sons of Confederate Veterans objected to what they saw as the guidebook's characterization of Lee as a traitor while other groups took offense to the term "invaded the south" used to describe Union maneuvers. These very different opinions resulted in similar headaches for the National Park Service which has to take all of these viewpoints into consideration.⁹⁵

By the 1980s, the National Park Service had streamlined the initial romantic and celebratory tour of Arlington House into a more matter-of-fact tour, which was revised yet again in order to reflect the mandates regarding slavery interpretation. The new tour premiered in 2004. In the manner of most Park Service sites, both of these tours were contained in a brief brochure that tourists consulted as they moved through the house on their own. Park Service rangers were stationed at various locations throughout the house to safeguard the collection and answer tourist questions. A side-by-side comparison of the two tour brochures exemplifies the changes to the average visitor experience at Arlington.

Each of the tour brochures begins with a brief history of the Custis and Lee families that provides background content for the walk through the house. The content of both of these background sections is similar: a brief history of George Washington Parke

⁹⁵ Karen Kinzey, interview by author, author's notes, Arlington, VA., August 11, 2005.

Custis, his relationship with George Washington, and his role in building the house. From here, the narratives move to the personal history of Robert and Mary Lee who were married at Arlington in 1831. The narratives conclude with Lee's difficult decision to resign from the United States Army following the Virginia Ordinance of Secession and his subsequent command of the Confederate troops. While both of these narratives follow a similar pattern, significant differences exist. First, the 2004 tour is much more specific about the house's role as a memorial to Lee "in honor of his dedication to peace and reconciliation after the war." This language appears every time the house is referred to as the Lee memorial. It replaced more ambiguous language from the 1980s brochure that venerated "General Lee, a man who gained the respect of Americans in both the North and South."⁹⁶ This small change is a significant departure from the narrative that surrounded the house's preservation and previous interpretations. While those narratives grounded their discussions in the Lost Cause rhetoric of Lee as a valiant Confederate leader and gentleman, the new narrative praises Lee's service to the United States as a proponent of reconciliation and reunion. By 2004, therefore, the U.S. government had separated itself from the Lost Cause veneration of Lee, though this narrative still guided many Confederate commemorative organizations' understanding of the Civil War.

The second major change in the opening narrative of the new chapters is the inclusion of slavery in the discussion. The 1980s brochure used passive language to describe the work of the plantation and only mentioned slavery when it noted that Lee

⁹⁶ Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Arlington House: The Robert E. Lee Memorial* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2004); Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Arlington House: The Robert E. Lee Memorial* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1998).

“opposed slavery.” In an attempt to integrate slave history with Lee history, the new brochure makes several mentions of the slaves. Simple changes of language make the visitor aware of the presence of slaves and the important work that they did. Administrators, for example, replaced the phrase, “His house, begun in 1802 but not completed until 1817” with “the home was built in stages between 1802 and 1818 by George Washington Parke Custis, his slaves, and hired craftsmen.” The new Park Service brochure also includes a completely new paragraph that explains the work done on the 1,100 acre plantation by slaves. This paragraph concludes by hinting at the variety of experiences of slavery on the site: “Custis emancipated a number of slaves, including the Burke family that immigrated to Liberia. Several slaves ran away from Arlington.” The new brochure also includes information about the use of the grounds for a Freedman’s Village which it describes as “a community established to house and educate former slaves.”

The rest of the Park Service’s new Arlington House brochure shows that inserting slavery into existing narratives does not always require a complete overhaul of the existing interpretation. The route that visitors take through Arlington House has remained unchanged in the new brochure [See Fig 1]. Visitors begin in the Center Hall where they can view the Family Parlor and Family Dining Room. From there, they proceed up a steep staircase to the second floor where all of the bed chambers are viewed from the center hallway. Returning downstairs via the main staircase, visitors proceed through the White Parlor and the Morning Room. An outside path leads visitors from the Morning Room in the South Wing to the North Wing’s Outer Hall Pantry, Bath and

Water Closet, School and Sewing Room, and several bed chambers. The basement Winter Kitchen and Wine Cellar are visited last. The end of the brochure invites visitors to see the slave quarters just beyond the house.

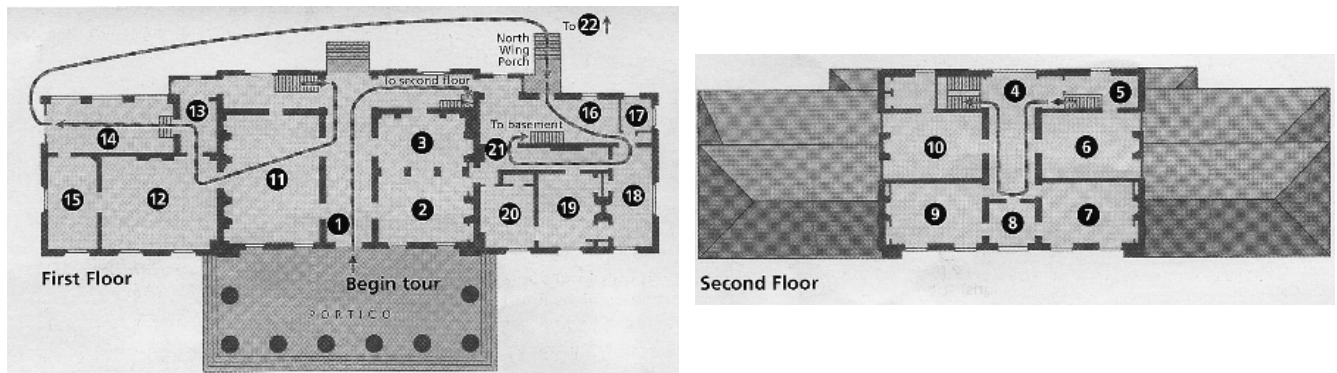


Figure 1: Floor Plan of Arlington House⁹⁷

While the tour through Arlington House remains focused on the Lee family, the NPS changed the language of the brochure to reflect the home’s slave history. In some cases, the history of slavery has replaced decorative arts information as in the Girls Dressing Room. The 1980s interpretation description of the room stated, “The Girls Dressing Room connects with the girls’ bedchamber and was also used as a playroom. The small cupboard on the wall belonged to Eleanor Custis who in later life presented it to her niece, Mrs. Robert Edward Lee.” The 2004 interpretation states, “The Girls’ Dressing Room connects to the girls’ bedchamber. It also served as a playroom. Here, Annie Lee conducted Sunday school for slave children.” In many other cases, the discussion of the use of various rooms and structures has been integrated with a discussion of who used them. For example, the servant’s staircase, which passed without remark in the 1980s brochure, now includes the information that “before 1861 these steps

⁹⁷ Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Arlington House: The Robert E. Lee Memorial* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2004).

would have been used primarily for slaves.” The description of the Winter Kitchen, previously interpreted only as providing warmth for the rest of the house, now includes specific information about an Arlington slave: “Slaves washed clothes and prepared meals in the Winter Kitchen. Cook George Clark was renowned for his biscuits and asparagus. Another kitchen was in the north slave quarters.” Following the advice of public historians on the need to talk about specific slaves and jobs wherever possible, the Arlington House staff also discusses Selina Gray in its brochure.⁹⁸ The initial background information for the site lists Selina Gray as an “enslaved housekeeper” and includes the information that Gray protected the house when it was taken by Union soldiers. This information is augmented in the rest of the tour with a picture of the slave cabins, which notes that Gray lived in them.

The more complete narrative of slavery at Arlington is contained in an exhibit in the slave quarters. In 2005, the slave quarters contained a temporary exhibit on slavery while the site administration compiled research to complete a faithful restoration of the quarters, a project that was funded by a Save America’s Treasures grant.⁹⁹ Following the restoration of the quarters, the museum staff will relocate the current exhibit panels to another part of the site. Each of the two slave cabins, which sit perpendicular to the house near to its rear entrance, contains a different narrative of slavery at Arlington. The

⁹⁸ Historian John Schlotterbeck advocated that museums include individualized stories of slavery during his work with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. See John Schlotterbeck to Susan Schreiber, 26 December 1998, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Planning, National Trust Headquarters, Washington, D.C.

⁹⁹ “Save America’s Treasures grants are available for [preservation and/or conservation work](#) on [nationally significant](#) intellectual and cultural artifacts and [nationally significant](#) historic structures and sites.” See National Park Service, Save America’s Treasures Program Details; available from <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/treasures/ProgramDetails.htm>; Internet.

south cabin discusses the general history of slavery at Arlington. It contains large text-filled panels with information about slavery on the estate. The main panel, entitled “Slavery and Emancipation at Arlington,” begins its discussion with George Washington Parke Custis’s transport of slaves from Mount Vernon. It then includes a few sentences on the specific tasks that slaves performed on the plantation: “Slaves who worked in the fields such as Lawrence and Jim Parks grew corn and wheat, cultivated vegetable gardens, and sold flowers and produce in the markets of Washington. House slaves, such as Daniel Dobson, Eleanor Harris, and Ephraim Derricks, worked as housekeepers, valets, cooks, drivers, laundresses, and gardeners.”¹⁰⁰

From this discussion of the beginnings of slavery on the estate and slave work, the Arlington panel sets off on the difficult task of interpreting the particular, and somewhat peculiar, history of slavery at Arlington. It is clear from the text that the exhibit designers wrestled with this bizarre history and feared creating a too-rosy picture of slavery at Arlington.¹⁰¹ This paragraph includes a relatively long discussion of Mrs. Custis’s education of the slaves, her plan for the gradual elimination of slavery at Arlington, the fact that the slaves were treated by the Lee family doctor, the slaves’ ability to earn extra money and participate in swimming and ice skating in their “leisure time,” and the fact that the Custis family rarely sold slaves and thus kept families intact. This discussion is

¹⁰⁰ “Slavery and Emancipation at Arlington,” photo by author, South Slave Quarters, Arlington House, Arlington, VA., August, 2005.

¹⁰¹ Karen Kinzey, interview by author, author’s notes, Arlington, VA., August 11, 2005.

tempered with a cursory nod to the inherent degradation of slavery: “Yet slaves were legal property; they possessed no rights and could be sold at a moment’s notice.”¹⁰²

The Arlington administrators also wrestled with Lee’s more difficult relationship with slavery at Arlington in the subsequent paragraph. Like many others, Lee expressed mixed feelings over the institution of slavery, viewing it as an “unpleasant legacy.”

After detailing several slaves who were freed by Custis, the panel notes: “After Custis died in 1857, the lives of the enslaved people changed considerably.” In the ensuing discussion of Lee, the exhibit paints him as an emancipator who disliked the institution of slavery. This characterization, of course, is contrary to the Park Service’s own definition of the causes of the Civil War, which puts Lee at the head of an effort to perpetuate the institution of slavery. The text reads: “Although Lee viewed slavery as ‘an unpleasant legacy’ and supported its eventual elimination, the enslaved community found him to be a more demanding taskmaster than Custis. Several, including Wesley and Mary Norris, ran away. Lee hired out some of the slaves to pay the estate’s debts, and the resulting separation of families proved unpopular. Yet, in the midst of the Civil war, Lee went to

¹⁰² The full text of this paragraph is as follows: “In 1804, Custis brought his bride to Arlington. When Mrs. Custis arrived at the plantation, she devised a plan for the gradual elimination of slavery at Arlington. A devout Episcopalian, Mrs. Custis provided the slaves with a rudimentary education for the purpose of religious instruction and as preparation for their eventual independence. The enslaved community also received medical care from the Custis family’s physicians. Slave families earned money by selling surplus vegetables from their individual gardens. In their leisure time, they took part in pastimes such as swimming and ice-skating. Custis rarely sold his slaves, and thus families remained intact. Far from powerless, many slaves possessed significant authority, and sometimes dictated the daily routine at Arlington. Yet slaves were legal property; they possessed no rights and could be sold at a moment’s notice.” “Slavery and Emancipation at Arlington”, photo by author, South Slave Quarters, Arlington House, Arlington, VA., August, 2005.

great lengths to execute a deed of emancipation to free the Custis slaves by 1862, as specified in Custis' will."¹⁰³

From this discussion, the panel offers photos with several lines of interpretation highlighting individual slaves at Arlington. The description of Selina Gray is typical: "Selina Gray, Jr. was the granddaughter of Sally and Edward Norris [also profiled]. As domestic slaves, she and her siblings polished the wooden floors and the andirons for each of the fireplaces. They remembered attending Sunday school on the second floor of the main house." The profile of Maria Carter Syphax, on the other hand, details how she received her freedom around 1826 and lived with her husband and ten children on her own property within the Arlington estate. Syphax's profile ends with the note, "According to Syphax family tradition, Custis was Maria's father."¹⁰⁴ The other two panels in the south cabin proceed in the same manner. An exhibit in the center of the room provides a view of the Freedman's Village that existed at Arlington from 1863 until about the turn of the century. After 1865, the Freedman's Bureau administered this village, providing educational and religious instruction as well as housing to newly freed slaves. The discussion of the Freedman's Village ends with profiles of former Arlington slaves and their lives after emancipation. Similarly, a panel entitled "Arlington from Slavery to Freedom" underscores the vital role that slaves played in Arlington's history both as a working plantation and as a historic site. Just as slaves provided the labor that supported Arlington, former slaves provided vital knowledge "critical to early restoration

¹⁰³ "Slavery and Emancipation at Arlington", photo by author, South Slave Quarters, Arlington House, Arlington, VA., August, 2005.

¹⁰⁴ "Slavery and Emancipation at Arlington," photo by author, South Slave Quarters, Arlington House, Arlington, VA., August, 2005.

at Arlington.” Following the pattern set by the rest of the exhibit, the panel details several former slaves who worked with the War Department as they planned the restoration.¹⁰⁵

The second exhibit space within the quarters is devoted almost exclusively to the preservation of the quarters themselves. In 2005, notes on the walls labeled different structural details of the quarters while a bulk of the text outlined the building’s evolution from 1824 to the present. Within this discussion of the preservation, administrators were careful to include profiles of the individual slaves who inhabited these buildings. The following portion is representative of the information in this paragraph: “Several house slaves occupied the rooms in this building. Daniel Dobson, the coachman, lived in the west room on the first floor. Eleanor Harris, the housekeeper, had a room in the attic.”¹⁰⁶

The interpretation of slavery at Arlington House represents a significant amount of work on the part of Park Service historians and staff to faithfully represent the history of slavery at Arlington. Their work and the public perception of its results are illustrative of the complicated task that confronts museums as they bring a slavery interpretation into their museum. In a 2004 interview with researchers from George Washington University, site administrators noted that one of the primary objectives of the interpretation in the mansion and the cabins was to provide accounts of the individual histories of slaves on the site.¹⁰⁷ These profiles accomplish their goal of personalizing slavery at Arlington and

¹⁰⁵ “Arlington from Slavery to Freedom,” photo by author, South Slave Quarters, Arlington House, Arlington, VA., August, 2005.

¹⁰⁶ “Arlington House,” photo by author, North Slave Quarters, Arlington House, Arlington, VA., August, 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Kevin Strait, “Presenting Race and Slavery at Historic Sites: Arlington House, Robert E. Lee National Memorial”, A Cooperative Research Project between the National Park Service and the Center for the

help to represent individual slaves in the interpretation. In addition, they broaden the average person's understanding of slavery as a monolithic institution by highlighting the ways in which individual slaves created lives and families for themselves. For example, several generations of the Gray and Syphax family are chronicled in the interpretation.

While the interpretation accomplishes some of its main goals, it is limited by the Park Service administrators' perceptions of the site's history. Karen Kinzey, for example, referred to the history of slavery on the estate as "bizarre," a characterization that is based on the large number of elite slaves who lived and worked there as well as both the Custis and Lee families' ambiguous feelings about the institution.¹⁰⁸ In some ways, however, the Park Service's reliance on extant physical structures and information about specific slaves and their families has contributed to the perceived uniqueness of Arlington's slave narrative. Arlington is lucky to have two slave cabins on the site. Additionally, their proximity to the house encourages visitors to take the time to walk through them as they visit the property. These cabins, however, were the homes of the site's most valued and elite slaves and the experiences of these slaves are unique within both the history of Arlington House and the history of slavery itself. Additionally, there is evidence that even this view of elite slavery is idealized because the text of the exhibit suggests that one or two people lived in each of the rooms even though it is known that at least eighteen people shared the cabins.¹⁰⁹ Because Arlington Cemetery occupies the

Study of Public Culture and Public History of The George Washington University," August 16, 2004, Arlington House files, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Karen Kinzey, interview by author, author's notes, Arlington, VA., August 11, 2005.

¹⁰⁹ The American Studies Department, The George Washington University, "Historical Interpretation and the National Park Service at Robert E. Lee National Memorial," 6, Arlington House files.

rest of the estate, Arlington House is not able to interpret the grounds and the cabins for the average field hand have long since disappeared. If it chose to interpret the experiences of these average slaves, the history of slavery at Arlington may appear less bizarre. In the absence of this additional perspective on slavery, however, the exhibit presents a skewed vision of slavery both at Arlington House and in general.¹¹⁰

Its exclusive interpretation of the elite cabins is compounded by the fact that in the discussions of specific slaves, Arlington House has focused solely on the favored house population. Furthermore, exhibit planners relied on family journals and War Department interviews with former slaves like Selina Gray, who stayed at the house after the Lees' departure, in order to construct this exhibit. The Arlington staff is lucky to have these rich sources but they cannot be used without context and perspective. The memories of favored slaves who chose to remain on the plantation and protect the household obviously will differ from the memory of the slaves who ran away after Custis died, for example. Additionally, resources from white family members are rarely, if ever, candid about the family's own feelings and actions towards slaves. In the case of Arlington House, the exhibit planners relied heavily on the diary of Lee cousin, Martha "Markie" Williams. An adolescent during most of her stay at Arlington, it is highly probable that Markie's journal reflects a biased account of life at Arlington. The exhibit

¹¹⁰ The American Studies Department at The George Washington University made a similar argument that the furnishing of the cabins "verges on being historically inaccurate and tends to produce an idealized image of relationships between masters and slave and slavery in general." Providing that the Arlington cabins are accurate, the study suggests adding contextualizing information about the average slave experience to mitigate this idealized view. "Historical Interpretation and the National Park Service at Robert E. Lee National Memorial," 5, Arlington House files. Kevin Strait in "Presenting Race and Slavery at Historic Sites: Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial" also argues that the exhibit text neglects to mention the "potential (and certain) hardships of enslaved peoples' lives." See Strait, 10.

itself hints at a darker version of slavery in its brief discussions of the breakup of families under Lee's management and the possibility that Custis fathered a child with one of his slaves. Without additional explanation or comment within the exhibits, these hardships get lost in an idealized image of the Lee family and slavery at Arlington. All of these factors combine to create awkward exhibit text that attempts to remain accurate to the perceived history of slavery at the site while also acknowledging the horrors of the general institution.

Additionally, while the Park Service is striving for a single American history, the overall interpretation of Arlington House still separates the "American" history of the main house from the "African American" history of the slave cabins.¹¹¹ The staff at Arlington is aware of these problems and attributes them to a lack of time with each individual visitor. As Kinzey noted, "in terms of what the typical visitor would hear about slavery, it's not as much as we'd like because they're gone in five minutes...it's mostly focused on Lee."¹¹²

This separation of American history has found expression in visitor comments about the tour. One visitor explicitly separated the history of slavery from American history saying that "this is sacred ground. It is a neutral place, no race, color, religion

¹¹¹ See Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002). In their analysis of contemporary museum exhibits, Eichstedt and Small categorize exhibits such as Arlington's as employing a "Segregation-of-Knowledge" strategy to avoid incorporating history into the main exhibits.

¹¹² Kevin Strait, "Presenting Race and Slavery at Historic Sites: Arlington House, Robert E. Lee National Memorial," A Cooperative Research Project between the National Park Service and the Center for the Study of Public Culture and Public History of The George Washington University," 16 August 2004, Arlington House files, 13.

should be mentioned here.”¹¹³ To this man, the history of the white family of Robert E. Lee was American history devoid of the issue of race. On the other hand, the history of the black families who lived and worked on the same ground as Lee did not represent American history but instead represented a racial history that could tarnish “sacred ground.” Other visitors recognized the separation of slave history from Lee history and felt that the current exhibit was an inadequate treatment of slavery: “Needs to be expanded!” Some visitors commented on the separation: “It’s too set off to side. People need to know about slavery history” and “This needs to be more apparent to the public.”¹¹⁴

For many of the visitors who commented on the slavery exhibit however, the separate narratives reflected their own conceptualization of American history. These visitors were pleased to see slavery addressed and appreciated the manner in which it was accomplished: “We remember as this exhibit tells the story,” “Excellent display – wonderful to be able to preserve this part of our history – God Bless America.” Some visitors even commented on the exhibit’s unifying nature saying, “Excellent display – most important to preserve our sense of national unity – Americans All” and “We are so blessed to be able to call Blacks equal *sic*.”¹¹⁵

Arlington House was not the only site where the Park Service worked to tell the history of slavery. In fact, the National Park Service’s 1991 acquisition of Kingsley Plantation from the state of Florida provided the opportunity to create a new

¹¹³ Kevin Strait, “Presenting Race and Slavery at Historic Sites: Arlington House, Robert E. Lee National Memorial,” Arlington House files, 16.

¹¹⁴ Visitor Comment Logs – Slavery Exhibit, Arlington House, Arlington, VA.

¹¹⁵ Visitor Comment Logs – Slavery Exhibit, Arlington House, Arlington, VA.

interpretation that would help fill the gaps in African American programming that were originally identified in the 1970s. Park Service officials noted in the initial planning for the site that it “offers the NPS the opportunity to interpret aspects of slavery and plantation operations and lifestyle, areas that are not well represented in National Park Service interpretive efforts nationwide.”¹¹⁶

In truth, the unique history of Kingsley Plantation and its inhabitants offered the Park Service a variety of interpretive choices. Kingsley Plantation, located on Fort George Island, is a Sea Island plantation home that had various owners, beginning in 1791 when John McQueen was first granted the land. Extant on the site is the Planter’s Residence, the Kitchen House, a barn, and several tabby slave cabins in various states of preservation. The museum is named for the resident who occupied it the longest, Zephaniah Kingsley. Kingsley was a prominent cotton planter and slave trader who was active in government during Florida’s tenure as both Spanish and U.S. property. Though never legally married, Kingsley’s will recognized his wife, Anna, and his ten children by Anna and two mistresses.

The story of Anna Kingsley is one of the most interesting aspects of Kingsley Plantation. Born in Senegal, Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley was purchased as a slave by Kingsley, married him, and became a plantation mistress with slaves of her own. Anna Kingsley’s life in Florida was characterized by continuous upheaval as she and her children had to navigate the changing racial climate caused first by Florida’s acquisition by the United States and later by the Civil War. In fact, Anna spent the years between

¹¹⁶ “Interpretive/Curatorial Plan,” Folder: Exhibit Plan – New, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL., 1.

1836 and 1848 in Haiti after new American laws threatened the freedom and prosperity of her and her children.¹¹⁷ She eventually returned to the United States only to flee Florida during the Civil War.

The planning of the initial National Park Service exhibits and their subsequent replacement with permanent interpretive structures offer a rare glimpse at the decision-making process that accompanies museum interpretation. When the Park Service took control of Kingsley Plantation, the tour consisted of a hodgepodge of artifacts and information spanning the colonial era to the twentieth century. The terms of the Park Service's acquisition of Kingsley called for it to continue the existing interpretation for a period of eighteen months while administrators planned new exhibits.¹¹⁸ In truth, the exhibit planning process appears to have proceeded in fits and starts throughout the 1990s and was largely determined by budget concerns.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the planning process in 1992, the NPS developed four themes to guide the interpretation of Kingsley Plantation including, "The Continuum of History," "Zephaniah Kingsley and other Plantation Owners," "The Plantation and Its Operations," and "Slavery."¹¹⁹ The National Park Service believed

¹¹⁷ Daniel Shafer, *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Slaveowner* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003), 63. See also Bethany Jay, "Jai, Anna Magdgigine" in *African American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999) for a discussion of racial codes in colonial Florida and the ways in which they changed under American rule. Under Spanish rule in the early 19th century, racial codes were less restrictive than they were in the United States. Slavery was not necessarily considered a permanent state and slaves often purchased themselves out of slavery or were manumitted. In addition, slaves were offered legal protection from abusive masters and relationships between people of different races were accepted.

¹¹⁸ "Interpretive/Curatorial Plan", Folder: Exhibit Plan – New, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL., 1

¹¹⁹ "Interpretive/Curatorial Plan", Folder: Exhibit Plan – New, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL., 5.

these themes allowed them to interpret the site from prehistory to modern times. It also provided multiple avenues through which to examine plantation agriculture and slavery. The prominence of slavery in this thematic outline represents a significant shift from the restrictive and white-centered themes that were criticized by the ABC's 1976 report. A 1993 revision of this interpretive plan added two "concepts" that would "assist in guiding the interpretation of those themes." These concepts furthered the Park Service's commitment to telling the story of slavery on the site. For example, by including a concept that focused on the importance of every individual who lived and worked on the island, the Park Service could shift the narrative of the plantation away from the planters and towards the enslaved community. As the revised plan states, "It is difficult to understand a complex story with only half of the words...Slave and owner should be included in nearly all of the interpretive media." The second concept that the Park Service developed was the syncretism of cultures on the island that resulted from the blending of African and European traditions. In order to meet the requirements of this new interpretive scheme, the Park Service determined that slavery and Zephaniah Kingsley should receive priority in exhibit planning and research.¹²⁰

Visitor goals and experiences were a large part of the interpretive planning process at Kingsley Plantation. NPS staff recognized that most visitors would want to tour both the Main House and the Kitchen House and therefore making these structures accessible was of primary importance. In addition, administrators wanted visitors to

¹²⁰ "Interpretive Themes," Folder: Plantation House Exhibits 4/93, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1; "Current Exhibits Fulfilling Thematic Areas". Folder: Plantation House Exhibits 4/93, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1.

“leave with a knowledge of the site’s primary interpretive themes” and their relation to larger NPS themes including Plantation Agriculture and Slavery and Plantation Life. Specifically, “Visitors should acquire an institutional and operational sense of place relating to a) slavery and plantation life, b) individuals associated with the site and, c) the existing structures.” The National Park Service was still hesitant in its approach to slavery, however, and administrators clearly were thinking of the possible public reaction to the increased attention given to slavery when they wrote, “The interpretive story will reflect value neutral themes and ideas and will be fact based. It will be honest and will not victimize the story. This is especially important when covering the plantation life and slavery themes.”¹²¹

The meaning behind this curious visitor goal was elucidated in a later document surrounding the interpretive plan. Interpretive Specialist Paul Ghioto and Kingsley Site Supervisor Brian Peters acknowledged that the interpretation of slavery was the “biggest operational challenge and opportunity” at Kingsley Plantation and they recognized the Park Service’s lack of experience in interpreting slavery as a cause of this challenge. Additionally, Ghioto and Peters felt that slavery, as a “broad social institution which is often misunderstood,” created “a strong and varied emotional response from the visiting public.”¹²² Ghioto and Peters recognized that training and research would help to ensure a balanced interpretation and, “Ignorance of the subject, attitudes and stereotypes play a part in the reception of the message, requiring that interpreters be very clear in their

¹²¹ “Visitor Goals and Experiences”. Folder: Exhibit Plan - New. Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL., 1.

¹²² Paul Ghioto and Brian Peters, “Kingsley – A Sea Island Plantation,” Folder: Plantation House Exhibits 4/93, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL., 3-4.

language.” They also insisted that the information be presented “without assigning personal values and opinions, allowing the public to draw their own conclusions.”

Kingsley Plantation represented a microcosm of the Park Service’s inclusive interpretive goals as Ghioto and Peters explained, “Ultimately there should be no distinction between African American history programs and standard interpretive programs.”¹²³ The result of this interpretive planning was an exhibit that aimed to present the “story of a plantation, slavery and the time, not just the wealthy planter” through text panels, images, and reproductions, and artifacts.¹²⁴

Within the Main House, exhibit planners dispensed with the typical historic house museum displays in favor of panels describing the lives of Zephaniah and Anna Kingsley. The first panels that visitors encountered established Zephaniah Kingsley as a Scottish immigrant who engaged in the slave trade as a young man, a profession he described as “a very respectable business when I was young,” and eventually became a large landholder in Florida. An author of a book on what he termed the “patriarchal” system of slavery and an active contributor to debates on race relations in Florida, Kingsley’s own words were used to elucidate the changes that the United States’ takeover of Spanish

¹²³ Paul Ghioto and Brian Peters, “Kingsley – A Sea Island Plantation,” Folder: Plantation House Exhibits 4/93, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL., 4.

¹²⁴ The staff decided to dramatically change the existing operation and structures for both the Main House exhibits and the general property. See, “Alternatives,” Folder: Exhibit Plan – New, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1; “Alternatives—Use of Existing Facilities”, “Moderate Expansion of Interpretive Facility Through Use of Main House”, “Expansion of Interpretive Facilities and Slight Shift of Physical Emphasis”, and “Expansion of Interpretive Facilities and Major Shift of Physical Emphasis,” Folder: Plantation House Exhibits 4/93, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL.; “Temporary Exhibits, April, 1993 Kingsley Plantation,” Folder: Folder: Exhibit Plan – New, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1.

Florida had on the lives of the area's free and enslaved black population. The exhibit was careful to point out that Kingsley's words represent an "idealized picture of slave life."¹²⁵

The interpretation at Kingsley Plantation consciously attempted to "balance the story away from the single wealthy, Caucasian male figure usually associated with plantations," however, by including a discussion of Anna Kingsley in the Main House.¹²⁶ Of course, Anna Kingsley offered a unique avenue into this integration because she blurred the boundaries of slave and planter by occupying both positions in her lifetime. The interpretive goal of the Anna Kingsley exhibit was for visitors to "be able to understand or imagine what hardships an enslaved, then free, African-born woman endured to survive, and even achieve a degree of success."¹²⁷ The exhibit panels therefore began with a broad overview of the international slave trade, a discussion of the middle passage, and a general description of American slavery as lifelong and hereditary. From this context, the panels discussed Anna Kingsley's birth in Africa, her marriage to Zephaniah Kingsley and the birth of their children, her manumission in 1811, and her role as a property holder and slaveowner in Spanish Florida. The Anna panels went into detail about the deterioration of conditions for free blacks in Florida, her subsequent move to Haiti, and the end of her life in the Civil War era United States.¹²⁸ Because of a lack of evidence about Anna Kingsley's life, these panels only provided a biographical

¹²⁵ "Temporary Exhibits April 1993," Folder: Exhibits Zephaniah Kingsley, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1-19.

¹²⁶ "Exhibit Title: Anna M.K.," Folder: Anna.Kat, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1.

¹²⁷ "Exhibit Title: Anna M.K.," Folder: Anna.Kat, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1.

¹²⁸ "Exhibit Title: Anna M.K.," Folder: Anna.Kat, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1.

sketch of her life taken from the public record and Zephaniah Kingsley's writings.

Without the rich resources that were used to document and personalize the Zephaniah panels, the person of Anna Kingsley remains a mystery even after one has read through the exhibit and it is hard to believe that many visitors would have accomplished the desired visitor outcome of imagining how she may have felt as she bridged two very different worlds.

Exhibits on the remainder of the site discussed both slave life and plantation work in detail. These exhibits ranged in topic from "Living in Slavery," a discussion of the physical and mental hardships of slavery, to "Family Life," a look at slave marriage, religion, and culture, and "From Seed to Garment," a description of Sea Island cotton production. They were located in the Kitchen House, barn, and in wayside exhibits along the grounds.¹²⁹

These exhibits provided a solid overview of many topics in American slavery but exemplified the same lack of specific information that characterized the Anna Kingsley panels. For example, plans for the panel "Living In Slavery" called for it to read:

Many of the physical hardships faced by enslaved workers on plantations are readily apparent – extreme working conditions, inhumane punishment, poor living conditions. However, just as oppressive was the psychological impact of being human property. Basic choices concerning home, food, and family were made by the owner. Simple freedom to come and go, own property, and care for children as needed were not available to slaves.

Required to submit to the authority of the owner, yet determined to maintain their own self-respect, each enslaved person responded differently to the stresses and strains of bondage. In spite of appearances, slave owners did not hold absolute

¹²⁹ "Expansion of Interpretive Facilities and Slight Shift of Physical Emphasis," Folder: Plantation House Exhibits 4/93, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1; "Temporary Exhibits April 1993," Folder: Exhibits Zephaniah Kingsley, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1-19.

power over slaves. One relief from oppression was the independence permitted in the slave community. Feigned illness, ignorance, broken tools, and slow work were common ways to resist complete submission. Flight was a more extreme form of resistance; the risk of severe punishment was high. For those with families, escape meant leaving loved ones behind, enslaved.

The greatest fear of slave holders was the threat of slave insurrection. However actual rebellions were rare, localized and short lived and the possibility of success was small. With the odds stacked heavily against them, perhaps surviving the institution of slavery was the greater measure of success.¹³⁰

While this discussion of slave life is succinct, balanced, and accurate, it could be located in virtually any plantation museum. Only one slave “Jimmy,” the son of Kingsley relative George Gibbs, was named in the Kingsley Plantation exhibit panels. Jimmy’s appearance in the exhibits is due to the fact that he was sold three times within the course of four years. The exhibits included transcriptions of the receipt for his sale and stated in the panels: “We can only guess why these rapid transactions occurred and what effect they had on Jimmy’s life.” Tellingly, in the planning documents for this exhibit, an editor crossed out a sentence that suggested that, “With further research we may be able to get a better picture.”¹³¹

When National Park Service employees began planning the site’s permanent exhibits in 2004, they reached out to the public to ensure that the information and delivery methods of the new interpretation were in line with visitor expectations. They developed a “Kingsley Plantation Exhibit Plan Newsletter” and “Public Comment Response Form” in order to gather this information. Additionally, Kingsley Plantation

¹³⁰ The text of all of the exhibit panels quoted was edited by a Kingsley Plantation employee. The quotes of all of this text reflect the penciled in editorial marks of this employee. “Temporary Exhibits April 1993 – Exhibit 1K-1,” Folder: Exhibits: Slavery – Living In/Slavery & Jimmy Gibbs, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL, 1.

¹³¹ “Temporary Exhibits April, 1993, Text 1K-5,” Folder: History Files, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL. 1.

held three open houses where the public could provide input on the reinterpretation plan. After the last open house, the staff at Kingsley compiled the public's feedback.

In many ways, the public's response dovetailed with the Kingsley Plantation plan that was already in progress. Clearly articulated in the public response was the desire to learn about the life at Kingsley Plantation. Of the eighteen people who ranked the site's topics of discussion, eight people gave the "Orientation to Kingsley Plantation" a "1" on a scale of 1 to 9, thus designating it the "most important" topic. Six people felt that "Anna Kingsley" was "most important" and five people felt that "Life at Kingsley Plantation" was most important. Another five people ranked "Plantation Agriculture" and "Plantation Life" a "3" on the scale of 1-9. While slavery and race relations were addressed as themes of the new interpretation, the response form did not explicitly ask for comment on slavery. Instead, the staff asked visitors to provide a 1-9 ranking for "Zephaniah Kingsley, slavery and race relations." Five people ranked this topic a "1" (1 person) or "2" (4 people). When asked the open-ended question, "What would you expect to do or see at Kingsley Plantation?," visitors explicitly mentioned learning about the lives and work of slaves (2 people), learning about a slave plantation (2 people), learning about how slaves were treated (2 people), and learning about slave resistance (1 person). A majority of the responses reflected a more general desire to learn about the plantation and the people who inhabited it without explicitly mentioning slavery.

In the end, the staff of Kingsley Plantation embraced the site's ability to blend a general history of plantation slavery, Florida's history, and the specifics of the site.¹³² To accomplish its goals, the administration developed signage that will be used both in the plantation house and on the grounds. As their goals would necessitate, the signage both addresses life at Kingsley and American slavery in general. The use of signage exclusively – until a planned audio tour is developed – means that Kingsley Plantation only has a few lines with which to tell their story. The result is a very frank discussion of slavery. For example, an orientation panel entitled “Plantation Slavery” reads: “The exploitation of enslaved people differed throughout the Americas. However, the bottom line was profit for the owner, while for the slave it was loss of freedom. Slaves were possessions. They were viewed as a valuable commodity to be bought and sold and forced to work. Their owners determined what they did and how they were treated for their entire lifetime.”¹³³ Similarly, when talking about Zephaniah Kingsley, the text represents a significant shift from the earlier interpretation as it no longer attempts to soften or romanticize his role as a slaveholder. Instead, the panel describes him as “exploiting the bodies and spirits of other human beings. As a slave trader turned planter, Kingsley had strong opinions about how to maximize his profit through the management of slaves.”

To provide insight into the different perspectives on the experience of Sea Island slavery, panels entitled “Looking Back,” outside of the Kitchen House, use the landscape

¹³² Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, *Kingsley Plantation Exhibit Plan Newsletter*, April 2004, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL., 7.

¹³³ “Exhibit Plan Text,” developed for Kingsley Plantation, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL., 1.

to implicitly compare the lives of slaves and planters. On the panel looking towards a field, visitors are asked to “imagine...instead of the lush green landscape of today, a long dusty road stretched to the slave cabins and fields beyond. Bent over cotton plants, under the hot sun and dust-filled air, enslaved people toil day in and day out amidst the odor of sweat and domestic animals. The slaves’ constant companions are the relentless mosquitoes and flies.” On the opposing panel overlooking the Plantation House, however, the text reads, “Imagine...instead of the empty historic building and peaceful riverfront of today, a slave owner’s family sit watching from the porch of their comfortable home as cargo-laden boats pass by on the river. Breezes off the water cool the planter’s family. Smells of fresh baked bread waft from the kitchen. House slaves carry turtle soup to the planter’s home. High up on the widow’s walk; the owner keeps a watchful eye on his slaves as they hustle across the kitchen yard.”¹³⁴ As these examples indicate, Kingsley’s text is a “warts and all” interpretation of the site. In fact, after some debate, Park Service staff even included a panel called “Life as Property” that states, “Slaves were denied privacy and free will. They were forced to subject themselves to the will of others, forced to submit to verbal and physical abuse, and forcibly and legally raped. Families were torn apart, mothers from children, men from women.”¹³⁵

The National Park Service cannot be charged with ignoring or minimizing the existence of slavery at Kingsley Plantation. In fact, slavery is mentioned on every panel in the new exhibit. When specific information about Kingsley Plantation was unavailable, staff used general quotes from sources such as Solomon Northrup’s and

¹³⁴ Ibid, 8-9.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 11.

Henry Bibb's fugitive slave memoirs and pictures from published texts. The net effect of this interpretation is that the specifics of slavery at Kingsley are supplemented by more general information about slave culture and resistance, the middle passage, and other topics.

The centrality of slavery at Kingsley Plantation, both as a general topic and as it relates to the site, begs the question: Why Kingsley? Part of the answer surely lies in the 24 extant slave cabins. As early as 1979, visitors advocated for the importance of the cabins, noting the "incompleteness of the tour as the slave quarters are not included." Representatives from the Florida State Senate made a similar claim in 1988 when the site was still under the state's control, "An important part of [Kingsley] and its teeming history has, for some reason, been overlooked and left out" and called for the restoration and interpretation of the cabins.¹³⁶ The existence and preservation of these cabins offers Kingsley Plantation a rare opportunity to discuss slavery within a landscape that still bears its marks.

The other, more important reason, however, may be the relative obscurity of Zephaniah Kingsley in the minds of Americans. As an individual, Kingsley is not an established part of the average American's understanding of American history in the way that Robert E. Lee is. Nor is he connected with a transformational moment in American history such as the Civil War. An interpretation that directs attention away from his life and toward the enslaved community is therefore much more palatable at his home than it

¹³⁶ Beulah M. Flournoy to Ney C. Landrum, June 21, 1979, Folder: Slave Quarters: Interpretation: 1970s, DNR Correspondence, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL.; Representative Bill Clark, Representative Corrine Brown, and Senator Arnett Giradeau to Tom Gardner, August 15, 1988, Folder: Slave Quarters: Interpretation: 1970s, DNR Correspondence, Kingsley Plantation offices, Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, Jacksonville, FL. 1.

would be at other Park Service sites. In fact, since most of Kingsley Plantation's interpretation focuses on Florida as a Spanish colony, the site's colonial history is not even part of a traditional narrative of American history in the English colonies. Last, the fact that an African woman, Anna Kingsley, was complicit in slavery at Kingsley means that the site can skirt the issue of creating racial heroes and villains. In this way, the interpretation at Kingsley Plantation still enforces the segregation of American history; Kingsley Plantation has become the perfect place to talk about slavery because the Park Service does not have to discuss it alongside another major narrative of American history. Whether consciously considered or not, all of these factors surely made Kingsley Plantation the ideal space to embody the Park Service's frustrated hopes for slavery interpretation.

The National Trust and Slavery Interpretation

While the Park Service's organization-wide efforts to expand their interpretation of African American and slave history began in the 1970s, the National Trust began this process much later. Instead, Trust leadership relied on the individual National Trust sites that had a history of slavery to take the initiative to incorporate slavery into their tours. Absent any directives from Trust headquarters, however, these sites had varying levels of commitment to this new narrative. By 1998, Decatur House, for example, housed a permanent exhibition that showed slaves cleaning silver in the dining room and explained the service wing as the home of slaves.¹³⁷ At Oatlands, a Virginia Plantation, the Site

¹³⁷ "Interpreting Slavery at National Trust Sites," Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative - Slavery Site Surveys, 2, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C.

Director described the subject of slavery as “crucial to the interpretation at Oatlands” and asserted that the guides provided a “substantive” discussion of slavery in the mansion, gardens, and grounds. How substantive this discussion was is up to interpretation because the Site Director also pointed out the problem of discussing the complexity of slavery within a thirty minute tour: “Besides slavery, the guides at Oatlands also interpret the impact of the Federalist Period, the War of 1812, canal transportation, the Civil War, Reconstruction, World War I, World War II, and the post war period.”¹³⁸ Of course, not all Trust sites were committed to including slavery. In 1998, Belle Grove, another Virginia plantation, was still using a 1967 tour script that did “not include slavery in any way.” Cliveden Plantation, in Pennsylvania, similarly noted that slavery on its tour was “peripherally mentioned.” Because the National Trust does not require its guides to use scripted tours, virtually all of the sites acknowledged that the interpretation varied depending on the individual docent’s level of comfort with the topic. In 1998, National Trust administrators candidly acknowledged, “While a number of the sites provide visitors with interpretive content about the work of slaves, their skills, and in some cases family and community life, [no sites] are directly addressing the dark realities of slave labor.”¹³⁹

Despite this uneven progress, the National Trust may have been content to let the interpretation of slavery proceed in this piecemeal fashion if it were not for the

¹³⁸ “Interpreting Slavery at National Trust Sites – Oatlands Questionnaire and Needs Assessment,” Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative - Slavery Site Surveys, 1-3, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C.

¹³⁹ “Interpreting Slavery at National Trust Sites,” Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative - Interpreting Slavery, 2-6, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C.

persistence of two citizens, David Sides and Doug Myrick. While visiting several historic sites, Sides and Myrick became outraged at the lack of any substantive discussion of slavery and began a campaign to have meaningful interpretations included in plantation museums. In a newspaper article detailing their crusade, Myrick stated, “It was the rule rather than the exception that [tour guides] wanted to discuss the founding fathers and the wonderful business aspects of the plantation, but they did not want to discuss the fact that it was a system based on chattel slavery.”¹⁴⁰

Sides’ and Myrick’s crusade included several National Trust sites in the D.C. area and after months of what they perceived as inconsistent and inadequate work on the part of individual sites to include a more meaningful discussion of slavery, they lodged a formal complaint with Department of the Interior and Congressional leaders charging that the National Trust refused to: implement “a comprehensive educational program” that includes slavery, use federal tax dollars to support slavery interpretation, and answer their questions about the implementation of this new interpretation.

These actions got the attention of Congressional leaders such as Representative John Lewis and Senator Charles Robb, both of whom followed up with letters to Trust President Richard Moe. Lewis’s letter neatly expressed the centrality of slavery to American history alongside the particular and unique importance of slavery as part of African American heritage: “It is impossible to understand plantation history or the history of our nation without understanding slavery. In fact, for tens of millions of

¹⁴⁰ Wendy Melillo, “2 Men on a Mission to Make Information on Slavery a Bigger Part of Plantation Tours,” *The Washington Post*, 25 September 1997, 3, in Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative -Slavery Site Surveys, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C.

African-Americans in our nation, slavery is our history.” Trust leadership responded. President Richard Moe expressed the Trust’s inclusive philosophy in his responses to Lewis and Robb: “At each of its sites, the National Trust is committed to telling accurately as broad and inclusive a story as possible – of the people who worked in the fields, constructed the buildings, served in the kitchen, as well as the wealthy families that originally owned many of the these sites...Nowhere is this more important than at sites where Africans and their African-American descendants were once enslaved.”¹⁴¹

The work of Sides and Myrick, along with the expressed concern of members of Congress, forced the Trust to go on the offensive in their slavery interpretation. To this end, the Trust initiated a survey of existing slavery interpretations at its sites.

Furthermore, in 1999, the Trust hired DePauw University scholar John Schlotterbeck to visit selected Trust sites, provide concrete information on how the individual sites should approach the integration of slavery, and run five workshops for Trust staff that would give them the knowledge and skills to implement his recommendations. The National Trust’s decisive and results-oriented plan of action represented a different approach than the more cautious and bureaucratic National Park Service. In fact, Schlotterbeck’s work was scheduled to generate real results at six mid-Atlantic National Trust properties -

¹⁴¹ David Sides and Doug Myrick to Kate Stevenson, “Educational Void Regarding Enslavement at National Trust for Historic Preservation Former Plantation Public Touring Sites,” Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – History Sites – Slavery Issues, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C., 1. Richard Moe to John Lewis, 18 September 1998, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – History Sites – Slavery Issues, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C. Virtually the same phrase appears in Moe’s letter to Charles Robb, 18 September 1998, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – History Sites – Slavery Issues, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C.

Belle Grove, Cliveden, Decatur House, Montpelier, Oatlands, and Woodlawn - within a year.¹⁴²

Correspondence between Schlotterbeck and representatives of these sites makes it clear that not all of the administrators welcomed the initiative and many worried about its impact on their visitors. After visiting each of the participating sites, Schlotterbeck wrote of several concerns that he “picked up” during his site visits. These concerns, while they did not prevent the initiative from continuing apace, lend insight into the cultural, psychological, and practical reasons why the National Trust museums had not already done more to incorporate slavery. Specifically, administrators were worried about whether visitors would find slave history interesting, were dubious about its importance to their history, and were skeptical about having the resources to make the necessary changes. To answer these concerns, Schlotterbeck wrote, “Because the Washington office initiated this project, I understand your wariness. My interest, however, stems from a passionate belief that black history is *central* to understanding United States history and to a conviction, naïve, perhaps, that *all* Americans can find this history compelling.” Still, Schlotterbeck noted, “Several of you are rightly concerned about the potential ‘political’ impact of this initiative among your guides, visitors, and community residents, especially since almost all participants are white.” These concerns were compounded by the fact that the initiative was “an unfunded mandate” from the Washington National Trust Headquarters. To this, Schlotterbeck responded, “The

¹⁴² “Agreement for Writing, Interpretive Planning and Training Services,” 18 August 1999, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Contract, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C.

initiative does not ask you to do many new things, but to focus some of what you are already doing on African American interpretation and to do this in a collaborative environment.”¹⁴³

In his role as consultant, Schlotterbeck helped participating Trust sites look at their properties in new ways and envision methods that could be used to further their slavery interpretation. In many cases, Schlotterbeck encouraged sites to interpret neglected areas of their grounds such as outbuildings and the landscape itself to provide a space to talk about slavery. Advocating for sites to move away from an antiques-focused manor house tour that gives priority to the white family and their “things,” Schlotterbeck asked virtually all of the Trust sites to try “visualizing one of the rooms or spaces as it was seen by a domestic slave or slave artisan.” Importantly, Schlotterbeck also encouraged the sites to look beyond the slaves’ role as a source of labor and provide some context for slave family and culture, specifically the interconnectedness of domestic and agricultural slaves.¹⁴⁴

At Washington, D.C.’s Decatur House, the work of developing a useful slave narrative was already in progress when Schlotterbeck became involved. In his initial correspondence to site administrators, he acknowledged, “You all have such a clear focus on where to go with this, I am not sure I can add very much.” Schlotterbeck did,

¹⁴³ John Schlotterbeck to Slavery Initiative Teams, 22 August 1999, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Correspondence with Sites, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴⁴ ¹⁴⁴ John Schlotterbeck to Slavery Initiative Teams, 22 August 1999, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Correspondence with Sites, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C. Schlotterbeck’s memo offers specific recommendations to individual sites but there was significant overlap of recommendations among the sites.

however, find ways to offer guidance and perspective to the work at Decatur House, noting that the various threads of the interpretation were part of a “master narrative of Decatur House as a social center of the nation’s capital and its black residents who had personal ties to the [African American] population in Washington.” Working with the available research and physical space would allow the Decatur House staff to elucidate their theme. Specifically, Schlotterbeck advised making the enslaved population an active part of the main house tour by talking about the “actual work of maintaining the household and social entertainments” as well as the specifics about who the enslaved population were. Unfortunately, the National Trust had converted much of the Gadsby Wing, originally built as a carriage house and residence for slaves, to offices in the 1960s. Schlotterbeck encouraged that this space be reincorporated into the tour, even if it was just to look at the building from the outside. Last, Schlotterbeck advised Decatur House staff to use some of their site’s unique qualities and stories to give nuance to the interpretation.¹⁴⁵ Katie Cavanaugh put Schlotterbeck’s advice into action when she prepared a paper, entitled “The Kings and Williamses: Evidence of Slavery at Decatur House,” which fleshed out the roles and relationships of the two main enslaved families that were owned by hotelier John Gadsby and his family. Cavanaugh’s paper inserted

¹⁴⁵ John Schlotterbeck to Susan Schreiber, 17 November 1999, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Correspondence with Sites, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C., 1; In 1998, Decatur House conducted an African American history tour for a predominately black church in Washington, D.C. This tour focused on the Gadsby slaves and included a discussion of slave quilts. Decatur House staff deemed the program a success and hoped to be able to continue it. This was a special program, and not the average visitor experience, however. See: Molly Neal, “Decatur House,” Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Slavery Site Surveys, 1, National Trust for Historic Preservation Archives, National Trust for Historic Preservation offices, Washington, D.C.

these invisible actors back into the story of Decatur House by using the kind of guided imagery that may be found on a tour:

When walking through Decatur House today, it is hard to see any sort of evidence of the enslaved African Americans who once made the house a working household. Yet, there is a slave presence in each and every room...Slaves would have probably used the fourth floor as their sleeping quarters before Gadsby built the carriage house addition....A slave would have been responsible for carrying the firewood in and lighting the fires in each room. They would have been responsible for cleaning and dusting. The silver would have been polished by black hands, the tablecloth would have been washed and ironed by a slave, the family dinner would have been prepared by an enslaved cook.

Through her examinations of wills and inventories, Cavanaugh was even able to make educated guesses about which slaves would have held certain jobs: “Henry King could have been Gadsby’s manservant, and would have helped him dress in the morning and accompany Gadsby on his errands through town...Perhaps Maria King or Maria Williams was the head cook and prepared each meal that was served by one of the older children, maybe Mary Francis or Charles.”¹⁴⁶

Despite the best intentions and hard work of Schlotterbeck, National Trust administrators, and the staff of Decatur House, the initial promise of the slavery interpretation initiative took a lot longer than one year to be realized. In what would be an ongoing problem for National Trust sites, individual docents incorporated slavery to very different degrees in their tours.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, in 2005, the staff of Decatur House was still working on physical restorations to the house, such as restoring the working

¹⁴⁶ Katie Cavanaugh, “The Kings and Williamses: Evidence of Slavery at Decatur House,” TMs (photocopy), 5, Decatur House offices, Washington, D.C.

¹⁴⁷ Schlotterbeck mentions this problem in the documentation of the slavery interpretation initiative. See, for example, John Schlotterbeck to Susan Schreiber et.al., 15 October 1999, 2. An interview with Katherine Malone-France, then Executive Director of Decatur House, on August 10, 2005 indicated that upon her arrival in July, 2005, the discussions of slavery at Decatur House were very inconsistent. Katherine Malone-France, interview by author, author’s notes, Decatur House, Washington, D.C., 10 August 2005.

kitchen as a space to discuss slavery, in order to more thoroughly focus the tour on “the architecture of enslavement and particular slaves.”¹⁴⁸ It seems likely that the Cavanaugh paper was written to provide the basis of many guides’ tours.

The core of Decatur House’s new slavery interpretation is a permanent exhibit located in the Gadsby wing, which housed several slave families during Gadsby’s tenure in the house. An early draft content plan for the interpretive panels was saturated with information about urban slavery in general, urban slavery in Washington, D.C., the architecture of slavery at Decatur House, the home’s residents, and the jobs each person performed.¹⁴⁹ This nine page draft elicited “concerns” from National Trust Director of Interpretation and Education Max van Balgooy that “the length of the text is a bit long, which will discourage visitors from reading it.” Still, van Balgooy was optimistic that “this can be overcome with good design.” Like administrators at other historic sites that attempted slavery interpretation, van Balgooy approached the topic with extreme caution and advised, “We’ll need to be extremely sensitive to word choices and language. As you know, this is a controversial topic and is bound to attract attention. But I think Decatur House is taking the right step to interpret this fundamental issue – I just don’t want people to get distracted by media and not examine the message.” In a series of editorial comments that mirrored the National Park Service’s debate over language, there seems to have been some debate over the use of the term “blacks” versus “African Americans” when discussing the large free black population in Washington, D.C. An

¹⁴⁸ Katherine Malone-France, interview by author, author’s notes, Decatur House, Washington, D.C., 10 August 2005.

¹⁴⁹ See “Decatur House slavery interpretive wall – Draft content plan 1/17/03,” Folder: Slavery Wall Development, Decatur House files, Decatur House, Washington, D.C.

unknown editor crossed out the word “blacks” in an early version of the text and replaced it with the more politically correct term only to have that crossed out with the comment, “I don’t know how many were African and not American per se and commonly referenced as blacks ie: free blacks.”¹⁵⁰ This issue was resolved in the final version of the panel, which explains its use of the term “blacks” as a historically accurate term. Of course, the logic of using common historical language to describe the black population was not applied universally. An early version of the exhibit panel used the term “servants,” a term that was used in the nineteenth-century, in reference to the enslaved population. This term was replaced by “slave” in the final draft of the exhibit.¹⁵¹

This debate resulted in a drastically streamlined version of the nine page plan with five panels of text that focus more clearly on the specifics of slavery at Decatur House and Washington, D.C. While the first panel is entitled “Urban slavery at Decatur House,” it actually examines the opportunities and restrictions of life as both a free and enslaved black person in the nation’s capitol. The panel discusses the connections that were built between the free and enslaved community through the hiring-out system and intermarriage. The panel notes that in the case of intermarriage, “The decisions of the owner determined if an enslaved family stayed together.” The information in this panel is grounded and contextualized by a timeline of watershed moments in the history of slavery in Washington, D.C., including the 1827 passage of harsh Black Codes. The most interesting story included in this timeline is that of Decatur House’s Lotty Dupuy.

¹⁵⁰ Max van Balgooy, “Memorandum to Sarah Tapper – Slavery Exhibit Text 3/10/2003,” Decatur House files, Folder: Slavery Wall Development, Decatur House, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵¹ Max van Balgooy, “Memorandum to Sarah Tapper – Slavery Exhibit Text 3/10/2003,” Decatur House files, Folder: Slavery Wall Development, Decatur House, Washington, D.C.

Highlighted in a large red font, the panel explains that Dupuy, “An enslaved woman owned by Decatur House resident Henry Clay, files a lawsuit [in 1829]...petitioning for the freedom of herself and her two children. After Clay’s departure and awaiting the court’s decision, she works as a hired slave for the new tenant, Secretary of State Martin Van Buren.”¹⁵²

The remaining panels focus squarely on the experience of slavery at Decatur House. The staff of Decatur House was particularly successful at examining slavery within the context of the home’s architecture, one of the themes of the existing interpretation. The text of the panel clearly explains how the home’s layout represented hierarchy and controlled the enslaved population’s movements. After a discussion of how Latrobe’s original design “controlled the visibility of the staff, allowing them to work efficiently but not be seen,” the panel examines the Gadsby extension:

These new ‘quarters’ created a barrier between the Black and White residents of the property, but at the same time allowed the Gadsbys to control slave access to the main house and to the city. The design of the building, with no doors leading into H Street, meant that all movement was directed into the courtyard. There slaves could easily be supervised from the windows of the main house. This architectural arrangement was common for slave quarters throughout the South.¹⁵³

This simple explanation of the representation of hierarchy and control in the building’s architecture effectively demonstrates the many ways in which slaves’ movements and even evidence of their very existence was controlled by their owners. Conversely, this same paragraph explains how the need to control slaves ordered the everyday life of slave owners.

¹⁵² “Urban slavery at Decatur House,” Final Exhibit Plan for Gadsby exhibits, Decatur House offices, Washington, D.C.

¹⁵³ “Slavery and Architecture,” Final Exhibit Plan for Gadsby exhibits, Decatur House offices, Washington, D.C.

From this discussion, the panels turn to the King and Williams family, using evidence from Cavanaugh's research paper. While a large part of these panels are family trees and lists of work, the administrators were able to provide images and transcripts of many Gadsby slave artifacts such as lists of slaves in Gadsby's will, an advertisement for servants, and a list of the amount of money that the Gadsbys were compensated for each slave when slavery was outlawed in Washington, D.C.¹⁵⁴

By focusing squarely on the particular history of Washington, D.C., Decatur House, and its inhabitants, the National Trust has passed up the opportunity to connect the lives of the home's inhabitants to larger narratives of American history. Situated in the heart of the nation's capitol and the home to men such as Henry Clay, who more than any other American was at the center of national slavery politics, Decatur House offers a unique opportunity to examine the nexus of daily life and national politics. By passing on this opportunity, the National Trust has passed on the opportunity to discuss the lives of slaves and slavery as part of our national heritage and national history and is therefore reinforcing a segregated understanding of American history.

Nevertheless, despite the concerns of the National Trust, slavery interpretation at Decatur House was not met with controversy. Following initial exhibits on the topic, the press seized on the story of Lotty Dupuy and the identification and planned restoration of the servant's kitchen, made possible by the discovery of grease on one of the doorjamb, as the most interesting stories to come out of Decatur's slavery initiative. The staff of

¹⁵⁴ "Who Lived in These Rooms," Final Exhibit Plan for Gadsby exhibits, Decatur House offices, Washington, D.C.; "Daily Life," Final Exhibit Plan for Gadsby exhibits, Decatur House offices, Washington, D.C.

Decatur House, on the other hand, used the press coverage to reiterate their organizational philosophy: “We can’t understand American history without understanding the African American experience.”¹⁵⁵

This matter-of-fact assertion that African American history is central to the narrative of the American experience is deceptively simple and belies the actual history of the National Park Service and National Trust for Historic Preservation. While both of these organizations were founded to preserve and interpret America’s historic landmarks as symbols of national identity and sites of patriotic indoctrination, their early history underscored the unity and importance of white history while forgetting or ignoring the contributions of others. Physically barred from many historic sites and virtually absent in their interpretations, African Americans would have to wait until the 1970s to see their role in American history even considered worthy of interpretation. Decades of hard work and resistance has since characterized both the National Park Service’s and the National Trust’s initiatives for African American history in general, and slave history in particular.

It was not until the 1990s that changing philosophies translated into new interpretations at the nation’s museums and parks. Still, the process of incorporating African American history into a national narrative is incomplete. None of the sites discussed in this chapter effectively integrate the white and black histories at their museums into one narrative. Sites like Arlington House, Kingsley Plantation, and

¹⁵⁵ Linda Wheeler, “A Slave Gets Her Say,” *The Washington Post*, 26 February 2000, Metro Pg. B01, Lexis-Nexis, November 2008. See also Patrick Butters, “Life as a slave near the White House,” *The Washington Times* 12 April 2000, C4, available from Lexis-Nexis; Deborah K. Dietsch, “Cooking Grease Clues: Tracking Down the Decatur’s Kitchen,” *The Washington Post*, 15 April 2000, H01, available from Lexis-Nexis.

Decatur House now present African American history at their museums but they still fail to incorporate it into a new and more inclusive narrative of American history.

CHAPTER 4

Founding Fathers and “Living Slavery:”¹ New Directions in Interpretation

“Any educational institution, if it is to remain vital, must from time to time reconsider what and how it teaches. The discoveries and reinterpretations of scholars, changes in the interests of the visiting public, the need to explain cogently the institution’s educational ambitions to prospective supporters, the development of new methods of teaching history to popular audiences – these and other factors have led to this redefinition of the history we teach at Colonial Williamsburg.”² With this 1985 statement, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation President Charles R. Longworth ushered in plans for the museum’s new interpretation, a broad thematic approach that would unite the various homes, businesses, craft demonstrations, and historic actors at the museum under the interpretive umbrella, “Becoming Americans.”

Colonial Williamsburg’s reinterpretation is evidence that The National Park Service and the National Trust for Historic Preservation were not the only organizations that altered their museums’ interpretations in light of the new social history. In fact, even the oldest museums with ties to the nation’s most sacred history and historical figures were affected by the priorities of the new social history. Alongside Colonial Williamsburg, Mount Vernon and Monticello decided (or were forced) to confront the uncomfortable, and in the case of Monticello, scandalous aspects of their site’s past. Lower profile museums such as Philipsburg Manor also followed suit, offering new

¹ Mackintosh, “Historical Challenges.”

² Charles R. Longworth, introduction to *Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1985), V.

perspectives on their site's history. Of course, each of these museums faced different challenges as they attempted to broaden their interpretive perspective. These challenges affected their interpretive decisions and ultimately, the visitor experience at the sites.

This chapter will examine the recent changes to interpretations at Mount Vernon, Monticello, Colonial Williamsburg, and Philipsburg Manor. While each of these sites have incorporated the history of slavery into their interpretations, they have done so via different methods and to varying degrees of effectiveness. Eric Gable and Richard Handler's study of Colonial Williamsburg's social history interpretation, *The New History in an Old Museum*, examines the recent trend-setting work at that site.³ This chapter will analyze the place of slavery within Colonial Williamsburg's new interpretation and suggest ways in which it has influenced other museums, thus contributing to a different narrative of American history and identity.

Multiculturalism and the Imperative to Change

When the new social history became popular, public historians across the United States recognized the challenge and opportunities that it offered. Historian Thomas Schlereth took up the subject in a 1974 edition of *Museum News*. His article, entitled, "It Wasn't that Simple," took on both museums and textbooks for their oversimplified version of history that highlighted the progress of the nation and organized interpretations around elite actors and political and military turning points. Schlereth used both Colonial Williamsburg and the National Park Service to make his point saying, "Williamsburg's emphasis on the political achievements of a select elite (Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson,

³ Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

George Wythe) as well as the village's...interpretative motif are well-known examples of this tendency to organize American history around the watersheds of warfare and politics (the United States, largely because of the National Park Service, may have more battlefield parks than any other nation)."⁴ The National Endowment for the Humanities furthered the incorporation of social history outside of academia in 1980 when it funded the American Association for State and Local History's series of workshops on the meaning and possibilities of this new approach. Like the organization itself, these workshops brought together university scholars and historical society and museum professionals from across the nation to discuss the implications of social history.⁵

Of course, not all Americans were willing to dispense with a traditional approach to American history, especially in the case of the patron saints of American civil religion – the founding fathers. Despite the discussions of inclusiveness and multiculturalism that the civil rights and Feminist movements as well as the new social history had engendered, many Americans still found it difficult to rethink the history of the founders. This fact was made abundantly clear in 1994 when details of the National Standards for United States History caused great controversy. Born out of concerns over the fact that American school children were underperforming academically, the movement to create

⁴ Thomas Schlereth, "It Wasn't that Simple," *Museum News* 56 (January-February 1978): 36. Schlereth argued that museums should be more transparent about the choices they make and the sources they use in forming their interpretations. He also argued that museums should move away from traditional chronologies. In 1984, Schlereth published a second article in *Museum News* entitled "Causing Conflict, Doing Violence" in which he suggested that museums interpret conflict and violence as essential parts of the American experience. In particular, Schlereth advocated that museums interpret domestic and extralegal violence. See Thomas Schlereth, "Causing Conflict, Doing Violence," *Museum News* 63 (October 1984): 45-52.

⁵ See James B. Gardner and Goerge Rollie Adams, eds., *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History, 1983). This book grew out of the NEH funded workshops.

voluntary national history standards tasked academic and public historians as well as educators and administrators with developing a set of unified benchmarks for history excellence.⁶

The History Standards, which were described by one contributor as “the study of a rich, complete United States history that portrays many people and points of view that have made this nation what it is,” were widely criticized as a “politically correct” version of American history. Lynne Cheney was at the forefront of this criticism and her attack on the standards, in the form of a *Wall Street Journal* editorial, had an attention-getting opening salvo - the standards ignored George Washington. Cheney stated, “Imagine an outline for the teaching of American history in which George Washington makes only a fleeting appearance and is never described as our first president.” In Washington’s place, Cheney argued, were “people, places and events that are politically correct.” She used the example of Harriet Tubman who is mentioned six times in the standards while “two white males who were contemporaries of Tubman, Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, get one and zero mentions, respectively.” Cheney went on to state that if the standards were adopted, “Much that is significant in our past will disappear from our schools.”⁷ Rush Limbaugh furthered Cheney’s argument on his television program, tearing pages out of a history book to dramatize the perceived shortcomings of the standards: “Here’s

⁶ The controversy over the National Standards is the subject of the book *History on Trial*. See Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, and Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books) 2000. This discussion is also included in Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

⁷ Lynne V. Cheney, “The End of History,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 October 1994, A22.

Paul Revere. He's gone...Here's George Washington as President. Look at all these pages in this book. He's gone."⁸

To Limbaugh and Cheney, the standards represented an attack on the fabric of American identity. As Limbaugh stated, "This country does not deserve the reputation it's getting in multicultural classrooms, and the zenith of this bastardization of American history has been reached with the new standards."⁹ The furor was not confined to conservative media outlets. Average Americans seized this rhetoric arguing that the standards represented "an intellectual disaster of mammoth proportions...for this country."¹⁰ Multiculturalism was at once the buzzword of the new social history, the future of public history, and a symbol of all that was wrong in American history.

By the time the standards controversy erupted, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association had already been forced to deal with the imperatives of multiculturalism at their site. In 1982, *Washington Post* columnist Dorothy Gilliam wrote an article about the neglected slave burial ground with its 1928 stone marker, describing it as "too unimportant to be roped off or otherwise distinguished from the other parts of the property." When she questioned Mount Vernon archivist John Rhodehamel about why the graveyard was not recognized as part of the documented property, his answer was steeped in the concerns of physical and visual authenticity that characterized an earlier phase of museum administration: "I don't know how to restore it...There were no

⁸ Transcript of Rush Limbaugh television program, 28 October 1994, quoted in Nash et.al., 5.

⁹ Transcript of Rush Limbaugh television program, 28 October 1994, quoted in Nash et.al., 5.

¹⁰ "Public Forum Proposed History Standards Slight Greatness," *Los Angeles Daily News*, 4 November 1994, N24.

pictures. There was one newspaper account from the 1840s of a visit to Mount Vernon and it mentioned that there were just mounds.”¹¹

Gilliam’s article provided the impetus for a movement that culminated in a new memorial to Mount Vernon’s slaves. Fairfax County Supervisory James Scott was outraged by Gilliam’s description of the neglected monument. He contacted NAACP lawyer Frank Matthews when the MVLA petitioned for tax-exempt status for two of the restaurants on its grounds. Matthews attended the meeting to vote on the MVLA’s petition and objected to its passage “based on several factors including that the slave burial ground at Mt. Vernon was not a part of the tourist presentation, that the site was completely overgrown with underbrush, and that these omissions represented a offense to the citizens of Fairfax in particular and the entire nation.” Together, Matthews argued, these offenses violated the county’s human rights ordinance. Predictably, Matthews’s objection got the immediate attention of Mount Vernon director Frank Castellani who pledged at the meeting to work with Matthews to properly memorialize the slave burial ground. With this pledge, tax-exempt status was granted and the first meeting to construct a new memorial was held less than a week later.¹²

After weighing several options, Matthews, Castellani and other community leaders decided to sponsor a competition among architecture students from Howard University to design the new memorial. The MVLA was specific about the spirit and message of the memorial and ensured that the winning design would strike an appropriate

¹¹ Dorothy Gilliam, “Remembrance,” *The Washington Post*, 6 February 1982, B1, Folder: Slave Memorial, MVLA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA.

¹² Frank L. Matthews, “Fairfax NAACP Slave Memorial Project,” 6 November 1982, Folder: Slave Memorial, MVLA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA.

tone. Unable to abandon a celebratory message, even while acknowledging a painful legacy, the materials for the competition clearly stated that the designs should “reflect the strength evidenced by a people who were extracted from the homeland, survived the middle passage, held in involuntary servitude in an unfamiliar culture/land and contributed to the birth and growth of a new nation, the United States of America.” Underlined at the end of the competition instructions was the following statement: “Socio-political statements about slavery and the pain and degradation associated therewith should not be expressed in your designs. Rather, you should transcend those issues and seek to express courage and strength of a people.”¹³

The winning design reflected the MVLA’s goals. It was created by a team led by David Edge, a 28-year-old student. Edge’s design featured a gray granite column that is angled at the end. Three concentric circles labeled “faith,” “hope,” and “love” surround the column. A brick archway marks the entrance to the memorial, echoing a similar archway at the entrance of Washington’s grave. In contrast to the inscription to the “many faithful colored servants” that marks the 1928 memorial, the new version reads: “In memory of the Afro Americans who served as slaves at Mount Vernon. This Monument marking their burial ground dedicated September 21, 1983 Mount Vernon Ladies Association.”

The ceremony to dedicate Edge’s design served as evidence of the persistence of Washington’s position as a saint of American civil religion. The various speakers represented the contradictory impulses to lionize Washington as the father of the country

¹³ “The Mount Vernon Slave Burial Ground Memorial Competition Program,” Folder: Slave Memorial Howard University Design Competition – Competition Jury, MVLA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA., 2-3.

and recognize him as complicit in the enslavement of hundreds of people. Predictably, the Regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Mrs. Thomas Dunway Anderson of Richmond, offered remarks that did not stray from the celebratory narrative of George Washington that was so familiar to Mount Vernon. In what must have been a cringe-inducing statement for many of the dignitaries assembled, Anderson began her talk by welcoming everyone to the ceremony "to honor the memory of the loyal and faithful Mount Vernon slaves who are buried here." This statement smacked more of the 1928 monument than it did of the 1983 celebration. From this inauspicious beginning, Anderson moved to the heart of her short remarks, a succinct defense of George Washington as a slaveholder and a celebration of his enlightened views on slavery.

Anderson's remarks are worth quoting at length:

Before turning the program over to our Master of Ceremonies, I have a few brief remarks.

George Washington was opposed to slavery. This is demonstrated, as he put it in 1797, 'I wish from my soul that the Legislature of the State could see the policy of a gradual abolition of Slavery...' Also, his last will and testament stated, "It is my will & desire that all the Slaves which I hold in my own right, shall receive their freedom."

Abolition was not in style in the eighteenth century. Anti-slavery sentiment was present, in England as well as in its colonies, but it was a minority view. Another 60 years were to go by before abolition came to represent a majority view. Even then it took a vicious and debilitating war which tore the nation asunder before emancipation came to be the law of the land.

Thus, on this subject, as in so many other ways, George Washington was a man of vision ahead of his time. No one can foretell the future, of course, but George Washington instinctively knew that the colonies needed freedom, that the new nation needed a republican form of government nurtured by a democratic elective system, and that no man should own another. His words and actions in all these areas are clear and decisive. Shortly before his death, with respect to slavery,

Washington wrote, “I am principled against this kind of traffic in the human species...and to disperse families I have an aversion.”

The greatness and compassion of this man are particularly evident in this solemn place. His own tomb stands nearby and, in death, he is joined now to those faithful ones who served him and Mount Vernon so well. With deep respect, the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association honors them today.¹⁴

Anderson’s remarks did more to memorialize George Washington as a slaveholder than they did the spirit, courage, and strength of his slaves. In fact, the only trait of Washington’s slaves that Anderson saw fit to pay tribute to was their loyalty and service.

Anderson’s remarks were out of step with the rest of the ceremony, which focused on the slaves themselves and featured the Howard University choir. Virginia Governor Charles Robb, for example, called for the same integrated narrative of American history that later, as a Senator, he would advocate for in the National Trust. Robb stated: “The contributions of blacks were fundamental, broad-ranging, and largely unnoticed in the anonymity of presumed inferiority” and “the history of America must be the history of all Americans.”¹⁵ Judith Saunders Burton, a descendent of Washington slave West Ford, had been active in the memorial committee and offered comments that were strikingly different in tone from Anderson’s. Burton read a poem that she had written for the occasion:

Here lie my ancestors
A people raped of a country
A people raped of a homeland
A people raped of a tradition
A people raped of a heritage

¹⁴ “Slave Memorial Dedication Invocation”, 21 September 1983, Folder: Slave Memorial Dedication Ceremony, MVLA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA., 1-2.

¹⁵ Donald M. Sweig, “A New Mount Vernon Memorial: Dedicated to More than Washington’s Slaves,” *Fairfax Chronicles* VII, No. 4 (Nov. 1983-Jan. 1984), Folder: Slave Memorial Dedication Ceremony, MVLA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA., 2.

A people raped of a culture!

Professor James Turner, director of Africana Studies at Cornell University, virtually refuted the characterization of slavery at Mount Vernon that Anderson had offered saying that the slaves of Mount Vernon were “not simple, loyal servants... These people buried here... were not members of the family when they walked these grounds... George Washington and George Washington’s slaves lived in different places and different times... on the same plantation.”¹⁶

An article written about Washington and slavery that appeared at the same time as the new slave memorial also reflected this impulse to celebrate the lives of Washington’s slaves while also celebrating Washington as an enlightened slaveholder. The article, entitled “At Least George Washington Let His Slaves Have Families,” was written by Donald Sweig, a historian for Fairfax County and author of the 1983 published report *Slavery in Fairfax County, Virginia, 1750-1860: A Research Report*.¹⁷ Sweig’s article deflected criticisms of Washington’s slaveholding by saying that it reflected “the economics and customs of the time.” Furthermore, while he acknowledged that “by contemporary standards there can be no excusing slavery,” Sweig claimed, “By the standards of his time and place Washington appears to have been relatively enlightened.” As the article title indicates, Sweig’s argument regarding Washington’s enlightened slaveholding rested largely on Washington’s conduct toward slave families. As Sweig

¹⁶ Phil McCombs, “Repaying a Debt at Mount Vernon: National Memorial Honors Washington’s Slaves,” *The Washington Post*, 22 September 1983, MVLVA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA.

¹⁷ Donald Sweig, *Slavery in Fairfax County, Virginia, 1750-1860: A Research Report* (Virginia: History and Archaeology Section, Office of Strategic Planning, 1983); Donald Sweig, “At Least George Washington Let His Slaves Have Families,” *The Washington Post*, 25 September 1983, MVLVA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA.

related, Washington did not “indiscriminately” break up slave families and allowed family members on his various plantations and those on neighboring plantations to visit one another to the effect that “most children grew up experiencing, at least indirectly, the bonds of an intact nuclear family.” Sweig included a discussion of the various slave families on Washington’s many farms, recreating the relationships from a detailed list of slaves that Washington compiled shortly before his death. Sweig also acknowledged the various jobs that the slaves performed on Washington’s farm and takes this argument further by stating that the slaves’ labor allowed Washington to pursue his military and political career: “Washington’s slaves had a profound effect on his political career, and therefore on American history. Because the slaves cared for his estate, he, like the other founding fathers of Virginia, had the time and leisure to devote to local and national concerns.”¹⁸

The cruel reality of slaveholding and slavery found their way into Sweig’s article, though the author mitigated the effect of this evidence by leaving it unexamined. While Sweig argued, for example, that Washington freely let his slaves visit spouses and children on other farms, he also discussed Washington’s “caution to his overseers about ‘the effect of nightwalking’ – he warned that slaves who were out at night would be less capable workers the next day.” This evidence suggests that rather than supporting slave visits as necessary for the families, Washington discouraged them. In talking about slave housing, Sweig included the observations of a Polish visitor to Mount Vernon that the slave houses are “‘huts...one can not call them by the name of houses. They are more

¹⁸ Donald Sweig, “At Least George Washington Let His Slaves Have Families”, *The Washington Post*, 25 September 1983, MVLA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA.

miserable than the most miserable cottages of our peasants. The husband and wife sleep on a mean pallet, the children on the ground; a very bad fireplace.” Last, in discussing Washington’s “concern for maintaining the integrity of his slaves’ families,” Sweig stated that Washington refused to sell his surplus of slaves because ““they could not be disposed of in families to my advantage, and to disperse the families, I have an aversion.””¹⁹ This quote was used by Sweig and others, including Anderson, as evidence of Washington’s benevolence. Upon further examination, however, it appears that Washington was perfectly willing to sell nuclear families away from their extended kin and their home and consign them to an unknown fate if he could have made a profit from the deal. By failing to discuss the full implications of this and other evidence about Washington’s slaveholding and focusing only on his enlightened philosophy, Sweig and others left Washington’s saintly status intact.

Without the intervening force of Dorothy Gilliam and other Virginians who loudly called for an improved memorialization of the slaves of Mount Vernon, it is unlikely that the museum would have taken such quick and dramatic steps to call attention to the history of slavery at the site. In fact, the experience of the other museums in this study indicates that they moved tentatively into the interpretation of slavery.

“Living Slavery” at Colonial Williamsburg and Philipsburg Manor

Since its opening in the 1930s, Colonial Williamsburg has been the standard by which all other museums judge themselves and the model to which they aspire. This

¹⁹ Donald Sweig, “At Least George Washington Let His Slaves Have Families”, *The Washington Post*, 25 September 1983, MVLA Archives.

holds true for Colonial Williamsburg's treatment of slavery and social history as well. Colonial Williamsburg was nudged into developing a social historical interpretation in the 1970s when declining visitation indicated that a new generation of Americans was too cynical to buy into the celebratory narrative of elite men offered at the museum.²⁰ In 1969, a Program Assistant for the Department of Interpretation was moved to address the lack of slavery at the site saying, "We have everywhere assigned a low priority to it" and offer several reasons for its absence. These reasons included "a corporate sense of embarrassment about the subject," insecurity about "our specific knowledge of slaves in Williamsburg," the awkwardness of the topic with "mixed groups of visitors," the reluctance to "arouse tender feelings among our own Negro employees," the assumption that "the presence of Negroes on the staff (usually in subservient jobs) was sufficient to suggest that we recognized slavery," and the substitution of "servants" as a euphemism for "slaves."²¹ In 1985, Colonial Williamsburg was ready to move past this discomfort and respond to visitor concerns with a new interpretive plan.

In their interpretive plan, entitled "Becoming Americans," Colonial Williamsburg administrators framed their social historical approach as a methodology that would allow them to more fully explore the origins of American identity. Explaining their theme, administrators wrote, "We sense that the million or more visitors who come to Williamsburg every year seek to know something of their own origins, not simply to hear the story of those who colonized Virginia." As evidence of the veracity of their "sense,"

²⁰ Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*, 4.

²¹ J.R. Short to Edward Alexander, January 22, 1969, CWF in Rex Marshall Ellis, "Presenting the Past: Education, interpretation and the teaching of black history at Colonial Williamsburg" (Ph.D. Diss.: The College of William and Mary, 1990) 260-261.

administrators offered the results of a 1965 survey that “revealed that a sizeable proportion [of visitors] felt Colonial Williamsburg should present the story of ‘ordinary citizens of colonial times, as well as the heroes.’”²²

The theme “Becoming Americans” would bring together the site’s disparate elements and teaching media in order to provide “a narrative account of past events, an account of European and African cultural traditions and their adaptation to the novel circumstances they encountered in the Virginia colony.” This new theme cast the story of Williamsburg as “a history of social change, it will start farther back in time, will feature a larger cast of characters, will reveal community relationships, and will give familiar political events and personalities a more informative context. Generations of Africans and Europeans, thrown together far from the homes of their forefathers, invented a social system, devised a political philosophy, and selected leaders, thereby laying the groundwork for a flexible and open society that has endured for two hundred years.” To clarify the interpretation, Colonial Williamsburg developed four topics, Government, Enterprise and Work, Family and Community, and Cultural Life. Each historic building or activity on the site interpreted the progress and evolution of one of these topics throughout the colonial period.

The Colonial Williamsburg staff framed their interpretation in the same unifying terms that categorized similar movements in the National Trust and National Park Service, saying that the multiculturalism and complexity of their new narrative would be

²² *Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1985) vii. This document represents a published version of Colonial Williamsburg’s “Becoming Americans” interpretive plan.

a part of “a re-telling of the American story” that “reflect[s] the major findings of recent scholarship.”²³ At the same time, the new theme revealed the complexity of retelling American history and suggested that the era of a single narrative of American history was drawing to a close. As the interpretive plan pointed out, the new theme was called “Becoming Americans” with the plural noun indicating that colonial Virginians did not become American but instead became “Americans of many different stripes.”²⁴

Slaves were just one group of “Americans” that Colonial Williamsburg discussed. Unlike the National Park Service and National Trust for Historic Preservation that developed slavery interpretations well after they began interpreting other social history topics, Colonial Williamsburg included a substantive discussion of slavery alongside other social historical topics. Following the pattern set by Mount Vernon’s slave memorial, Colonial Williamsburg included slavery by discussing the contributions of slaves to colonial Virginia. The interpretive plan articulated that it would address slavery through a discussion of the emergence of distinct African American music, family structure, and religion. It noted: “They, too, contributed to the complex civilization that took root here.”²⁵ The interpretive plan also hinted at a commitment to go beyond a celebration of African American culture in its discussion of the master-slave relationship as “the most American characteristic of all in early Virginia society”. This phrase is curious as both slavery and slaveholding are traditionally considered antithetical to American values and the rest of the narrative does nothing to clear up the confusion.

²³ *Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg*, 6.

²⁴ *Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg*, 4.

²⁵ *Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg*, 4.

Instead, it discusses the “growth of southern paternalism” and the “reciprocal relationship” that developed between slaves and masters including punishment and resistance as “just some of the topics that we need to explore.”²⁶

The hallmark of Colonial Williamsburg, the craft demonstrations, reflected the most basic effects of social history at Colonial Williamsburg. As seen in Chapter Two, previous craft demonstrations at both Colonial Williamsburg and its imitators examined material culture for material culture’s sake. Devoid of a social context, the work of skilled craftspeople served as evidence of American values like industry and ingenuity and invoked nostalgia for a simpler past. The “Becoming Americans” theme abandoned that line of interpretation. Instead, the interpretive plan for the silversmith, for example, required the interpreter to discuss “how and why silversmithing grew and flourished in America and Virginia, [give a] comparison of the English and American trades on the eve of revolution in styles, labor organization, training, and the silversmith’s social station, [discuss] the impact of Revolution and independence on the trade in Williamsburg and Virginia.”²⁷ By putting silversmithing in these multiple contexts, the “Becoming Americans” interpretive plan used the craft demonstrations as an example of cultural change in Virginia and the social hierarchy of Williamsburg.

By 1990, when anthropologists Richard Handler and Eric Gable began their fieldwork at Colonial Williamsburg for a book that would examine the “new history” being told at the museum, the “Becoming Americans” theme had had a substantial effect

²⁶ *Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg*, 4.

²⁷ *Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg*, 27.

on the interpretation of slavery.²⁸ Handler and Gable ably use an evening Christmas program at the George Wythe House as evidence of the incorporation of slavery into the “heart of celebratory Williamsburg.” The “disturbing” program was specifically designed to focus on the relationship between masters and slaves during the Christmas season, a season of celebration for masters and increased work for slaves. This program, though it was meant to unsettle traditional idealized notions of the Revolutionary past, began curiously by celebrating “Mr. Wythe...He was a gentleman with a brilliant mind, and...he was a lawyer, a teacher, a scholar, a revolutionary, and he was a judge.”²⁹ From this discussion of Wythe, the introduction then undermined the import of its theatrical presentation by implicitly comparing it to the house’s authenticity as one of the eighty-eight original buildings on the site and the fact the “the door that you’ll exit, the front door, even dates back to the 1750s.”³⁰

The presentation that followed was made up of four scenes and included actors portraying four slaves, Mr. and Mrs. Wythe, and Reverend Henley, a visitor to the Wythe’s house. The scenes were divided to show the different interactions between slaves, slaves and masters, and masters speaking among themselves. The first scene included a conversation between three slaves that was spoken in “an exaggerated dialect.” The slaves discussed what Christmas meant to them. A sample of the dialogue follows:

²⁸ Handler and Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum*. Handler’s and Gable’s book is an anthropological study of both the historic programming of Colonial Williamsburg and the corporate and administrative culture of Colonial Williamsburg’s offices.

²⁹ Handler and Gable, 103.

³⁰ Handler and Gable, 104. Handler and Gable cite the quote regarding the front door.

Slave 1: ...I gets a ill feeling about this whole Christmastime thing, and I just be wondering if we ain't be doing a whole lot of smiling on the outside, but cryin' on the inside.

Slave 2: You must be thinking about that slave boy that came here that that Jenkins man was talking about – how he got sold off after Christmas.

Slave 1: Well you know, that could have been any one of us! You know, some people think that they slaves is – treat 'em like things instead of like people....

Charles: An African man came through here the other day, talkin' about, he ain't never heard 'bout this Christmas thing. He said that they'd celebrate the harvest about the same time of the year. But this Christmas thing, he ain't never heard of. He said, he thinks it's a trick – to try to get us to do more work...³¹

After this conversation, visitors moved to the kitchen where an enslaved cook, Lydia, was musing about her family. Colonial Williamsburg used Lydia's musings as an opportunity to talk about the slave family. Lydia expressed pride in her grandmother – “she sure knew how to cook,” - and she recalled the lessons that her grandmother taught her: “She'd be singin' 'bout freedom and 'bout heaven. She'd be proud to know I'm doin' what she always wanted me to do. Big Mama used to say, 'Lydia, always keep your hands movin' fast. That way you have more time to rest!' Yeah. I didn't know what she meant then, but I sure know what she meant now.” Colonial Williamsburg furthered this narrative of slave families with Charles's recollection that he missed his family because it had “Been 'bout two 'bacca seasons since I seen 'em last.” Lydia's and Charles's gentle musings about their own families were starkly contrasted with Lydia's angry outburst about Mrs. Wythe, “If Mrs. Wythe come in here one more time tellin' me 'bout some relishes and sumpin', I'm gonna tell her...she can come in here and knead this here

³¹ Handler and Gable, 105. For a full description of the program see “Social History on the Ground” in *The New History in an Old Museum*.

dough.” The scene ended with Lydia giving Charles advice on “how to talk to them folks” so that he could get permission to visit his family.³²

The easy and informal manner of these conversations among slaves was contrasted with the formal and deferential ways that slaves addressed their masters. Visitors watched as Charles asked Mr. Wythe for permission to visit his family. Charles’s dialect disappeared as he presented a well-argued request to Mr. Wythe, “Sir, I’ve been longing to see my family now for about two years. I heard of illnesses and the bad humors in the family, sir. I assume you understand my position. I’d like to go to visit my mother and sister in Richmond for a week, sir – with your permission and a passport.” Mr. Wythe granted him permission.

The presentation ended as it began, with a focus on George Wythe. Reverend Henley’s remark to Wythe that “I was pleased to see that you let [Charles] go” opened a conversation between Henley and Wythe on the institution of slavery. Henley expressed some comfort at the fact that Wythe “brought them to church on Sunday for instruction” because bringing Africans out of a “state of barbarism” was the only possible justification for slavery. Henley also acknowledged: “I do not presume that that was the purpose for which they were brought out.” Just as Anderson had taken the context of the Mount Vernon slave memorial to argue for Washington’s enlightened views on slavery, Colonial Williamsburg used this presentation to present Wythe as a man trapped by a system of slavery that he abhorred:

Wythe: Well, I think, sir, that it had been far better had the institution of slavery never been entered into here in Virginia, or anyplace else, for that matter. But as

³² Handler and Gable, 105-106.

we have it, and it appears that it will be a great long time before we can find a way to abolish the system, I think it is the least we can do for these people to treat them as humanely as can be, and to introduce them, as you say, to the Christian religion, that they may have the benefit of that enlightened faith.

In case the audience missed the point of Wythe's benevolence, the skit ended with a third-person interpreter remarking, "Mr. Wythe definitely was against the institution of slavery, so eventually he did free all his slaves...Lydia Broadnax, and Charles...they were both freed. Charles disappeared from the colony of Virginia, never to be heard from again. But Lydia decided to stay with the Wythe's as their cook."³³

The presentation at the Wythe house offered a variety of information about slavery. Despite Wythe's view of himself as a humane master, the skit pointed out the slaves' feelings that they were overworked. Additionally, the dialogue among the slaves gave a sense of what it was like to be viewed as property while simultaneously offering an uplifting view of the strength of slave families and the ways in which slaves managed their masters in order to receive some personal freedom.³⁴

Interviews with visitors indicate that this discussion of slavery engendered mixed feelings. Two visitors remarked that the slaves were "very disgruntled throughout" the program "because the Christmas season is the time that they work harder." One visitor likened the slaves' attitudes to those of contemporary employees who "gripe about what they have to do, they gripe about the boss...and so they're human." Only one of the visitors expressed any sympathy for the slaves, however: "I work for the federal government, and I often complain about the judges for whom I work. *But* I'm not owned

³³ Handler and Gable, 108.

³⁴ Handler and Gable, 111.

by them. And...the disturbing thing, to me, was thinking of this black man coming in asking if he could go and visit his mother and sister. And, yes, you can go, but be sure to have the landholder with whom you'll be visiting sign your piece of paper. Well, I'm visiting here, but I don't have to have anybody sign my piece of paper."³⁵ While these visitors each saw the program, only one was pushed to consider the reality of being owned by another person while the other likened slavery to contemporary working conditions.

It is hard to know how much each visitor's personal history factored into his or her perception of slavery but the program's depiction of Wythe certainly mitigated some of the horrors of slavery. From the very beginning of the program, the audience was inclined to sympathize with and admire Wythe as a brilliant man with numerous accomplishments. Furthermore, by ending the program with Wythe's assessment of himself as a benevolent slaveholder, the program undermined the dialogue between the slaves and made their complaints seem unreasonable. Instead of casting them as property with the right to be angry no matter what the day-to-day living conditions, the skit cast them as disgruntled employees of a kind boss. While the two visitors that Handler and Gable interviewed were split as to their views on the slaves, both agreed that Wythe was a brilliant man and were "so happy that Mr. Wythe...didn't really relish owning humans. And that he did free his slaves." In this uneven treatment of slavery therefore, Colonial Williamsburg was more successful at portraying Wythe's feelings on owning slaves than

³⁵ Handler and Gable, 110.

it was the slaves' feelings on being owned. This fact did a disservice to the very history that Colonial Williamsburg is trying to highlight.³⁶

Special programs like those at the Wythe house supplemented the cornerstone of Colonial Williamsburg's new slavery interpretation, The Other Half tour. Developed by Rex Ellis, the Director of African American Interpretations and Programs at Colonial Williamsburg, The Other Half tour was, in some ways, a response to interpretations like that at the Wythe House. As Ellis stated, "Any discussion of slave life must be seen from the vantage point of the slave and not the master or mistress."³⁷ The name of the tour made reference to the fact that people of African descent made up one half of Williamsburg's colonial population and the tour would focus on the experiences of those people. The Other Half tour, which required a separate ticket, was offered twice a day, five days a week during the peak summer season and several times a week during the spring and fall season. Lasting a little over two hours, The Other Half tour was a walking lecture through the historic core of Colonial Williamsburg. The only building that the tour entered was the laundry of the George Wythe House.³⁸

Each Other Half tour was led by an African American interpreter. As the tour began, guides led participants through a discussion of African American life in Virginia from 1619 through 1770. The point of this lecture was to drive home the fact that the first Africans in Virginia were indentured servants and not slaves and therefore black

³⁶ Handler and Gable, 110-111.

³⁷ Rex Ellis, "Teaching Black History at Colonial Williamsburg: A Thematic Approach" Typescript, quoted in Anna Logan Lawson, "The Other Half: Making African-American History at Colonial Williamsburg" (Ph.D. Diss.: University of Virginia, 1995), 148.

³⁸ This discussion is taken from a detailed description of The Other Half Tour in "Talking About Slavery: The Other Half Tour" in Lawson, 123-171.

chattel slavery was a socially constructed system that grew alongside Colonial Williamsburg. The next major stop on the tour was the lawn of the Governor's Palace where the guide discussed the Middle Passage. Tightly packing volunteers as they would be held on a slave ship, the interpreter discussed the horrors of the Middle Passage including graphic details about the physical conditions on the ship and the fact that the women would be put on higher decks "for the sailors' pleasure." From this unsettling discussion, the tour moved on to talk about the legal underpinnings of slavery in Virginia, including Black Codes and slave punishments.

By this point, the interpreter had come to the Wythe House. The discussion there differed greatly from that offered in the evening Christmas tour. The guide led visitors through a discussion of the enslaved cook, Lydia Broadnax, and her son, Michael Brown. Brown was the only slave that Wythe educated and was included in Wythe's will. Visitors invariably drew the conclusion that Brown was Wythe's son. This open discussion of miscegenation was unique to The Other Half tour, however. Guides inside the house did not mention Michael Brown because there was no documentation about the relationship.³⁹ Surely, Lydia's musings about her family during the Christmas program would have taken on a much different tone and would have perhaps been more illustrative of the master-slave relationship if she had discussed her master as the father of her son. The tour moved on from the Wythe House with a discussion of slave

³⁹ Lawson, 146-152.

education and religion and concluded with the group playing African instruments together.⁴⁰

Programs such as The Other Half tour and the Wythe House presentation represented a giant leap forward in slavery interpretation. However imperfect its presentation of slavery, the Christmas program at the Wythe House brought slavery into the historic core of the museum. Additionally, The Other Half Tour represented a substantive and nuanced presentation of slavery that was not filtered through the perspective of slaveholders. Still, these programs were ancillary to the main features of the site and therefore represented the same segregation of American and African American history that would characterize Park Service and National Trust sites. In 1999, Colonial Williamsburg spokeswoman Kate Lanier recalled that during the beginning phases of African American interpretation, “The slavery perspective was in very small doses.”⁴¹

If Colonial Williamsburg dipped its toes into slavery interpretation with the first *Becoming Americans* interpretation, it jumped into the deep end in 1994 when the site staged a slave auction as part of a three-day celebration of the coronation of George III. The pairing of the auction and the celebration was historically accurate and, as its creator Christy Matthews argued in 1997, grew naturally from the types of slavery interpretation that were already happening at Colonial Williamsburg: “We had come to a place where we could either continue to move forward in our research and in our programming and really do some terrific stuff. Or we could slide back to what was comfortable...In

⁴⁰ Lawson, 152-154.

⁴¹ Dan Eggen, “In Williamsburg, the Painful Reality of Slavery” *The Washington Post*, 7 July 1999, A1.

reality, the entire staff of African American interpreters had been preparing themselves for this next big step before they knew what it would be.”⁴² The auction featured four African American actors portraying an enslaved washerwoman, a slave carpenter, and a husband and wife who were sold to different buyers. As more than 2,000 people stood watching, white actors, portraying characters based on historical research, commenced bidding on the human commodities.⁴³

The slave auction at Colonial Williamsburg brought into public debate many of the issues that had been hidden in museums’ inter-office memos that alluded to an indistinct “controversy” and “sensitivity” about slavery interpretation. Before the program even commenced, the local chapter of the NAACP expressed their objections. Citing hundreds of angry phone calls, Phillip Cooke, President of the NAACP Williamsburg branch stated, “We’ve been told that the auction will portray history as it happened... Whether it will or not is for us to see.” Salim Khalfani, also an NAACP employee, added, “Whenever entertainment is used to teach history, there is the possibility for error or insensitivity and historical inaccuracy.” Christy Coleman responded to these concerns with the statement that Colonial Williamsburg was “eminently qualified” to depict the auction. She expressed that the true import of the depiction of the slave auction lay in its meaning for contemporary race relations: “Racism is the child of slavery... If you don’t understand what happened during the time

⁴² “Conversation with Harold Skramstad,” interview, July 14, 1997, Colonial Williamsburg archive, Williamsburg, VA, quoted in Cary Carson, “Colonial Williamsburg and the Practice of Interpretive Planning in American History Museums,” *The Public Historian* 20, (Summer, 1998) 20.

⁴³ “Tears and Protest at Mock Slave Sale,” *The New York Times*, 11 October 1994, A16.

of slavery then you'll never understand what's happening now with race relations in this country.”⁴⁴

These protests only grew louder as the slave auction became a reality. One man proclaimed, “This is 1994...As far as we have come, to go back to this, for entertainment, is despicable and disgusting. This is the kind of anguish we need not display.” As two other protestors tried to prevent the auction from beginning, Jack Gravely, the political director of the Virginia branch of the NAACP shouted, “You cannot portray our history in 21 minutes and make it some sideshow.” Coleman, who portrayed the pregnant woman who was sold away from her husband during the auction, shouted in reply, “You all are going to watch!...I want you to judge with honest hearts and honest minds.”

The reactions of Cooke, Khalfani, Coleman, and other African American protesters to the proposed slave auction represent the different and sometimes conflicting views that the African American community held towards slavery interpretation in general. While Coleman saw the auction as an opportunity to explore the roots of racism and confront the uglier sides of American history, representatives from the NAACP saw it as at best an historically inaccurate production with no lasting educational import and at worst a caricature of one of the most horrible realities of slave history.

Furthermore, the protestor's comment that the slave auction should not be used for entertainment represents the conflict between education and entertainment that is at the heart of slavery interpretation in museums. Museums can no longer ignore parts of

⁴⁴ Leef Smith, “Williamsburg Slave Auction Riles Va. NAACP,” *The Washington Post*, 8 October 1994, B1.

the nation's past in order to celebrate its history. Instead, authenticity has become as much about the story told at the museum as it is about the authenticity of objects and buildings. In short, no matter how much research informs the historic core, the museum is no longer considered "authentic" unless it represents more than elite history. This requires educating vacationing tourists about the horrors of slavery in a way that ensures that they are satisfied with their visit.

In the end, Colonial Williamsburg's slave auction seems to have accomplished this goal. After watching the auction in protest, Gravely changed his opinion saying, "Pain had a face. Indignity had a body. Suffering had tears."⁴⁵ Similarly moving productions at Colonial Williamsburg have had the same effect. Commenting on the protests surrounding the slave auction, one frequent Colonial Williamsburg visitor relayed her experience watching a reenacted slave wedding. She reported that it taught her about the African American experience and left her "shaken." Seeing the reenactment forced her to empathize with the slaves: "these 'slaves' seemed so much like me, but they couldn't be legally married. What if I were the one governed by the whim of a master? What if I were sold or my spouse was? What would happen to any children I had?" This visitor ended her comments with an observation on the benefits of living history, "That slave wedding reenactment had a far greater impact on me than reading about 18th century slave life ever could have had."⁴⁶

Underscoring Colonial Williamsburg's commitment to programming like the slave auction, the museum has since incorporated slavery into many of its living history

⁴⁵ "Tears and Protest at Mock Slave Sale," *The New York Times*, 11 October 1994, A16.

⁴⁶ "Facing History Head-On," *The Washington Post* 23, October 1994, C8.

interpretations and “Enslaving Virginia” was the “theme of the year” in 1999. Since the auction, Colonial Williamsburg has introduced slave patrols that confronted their targets on the historic streets, a vignette that featured the sounds of a slave being whipped by a black driver, and depictions of slave families and enslaved workers. The effect has been dramatic. Some visitors have attempted to intervene in the historic scenes on behalf of the slaves, as was the case with one man who exhorted the fellow tourists to confront slave handlers saying, “There are only three of them and a hundred of us!”⁴⁷ At other times, visitors blur the line between actor and slave in the wrong direction, commenting about actors waiting to go on stage, “Doesn’t look like the slaves are working very hard to me.”⁴⁸

Reinterpretation at Philipsburg Manor

The import of Colonial Williamsburg’s interpretation extends beyond its effect on that site’s visitors. Always in the shadow of its illustrious older sibling, Philipsburg Manor recently debuted a slavery interpretation that was based on that of Colonial Williamsburg, although it had very different effects. In the 1980s, Philipsburg Manor first started interpreting slavery at the museum. The site’s significant slave history was not the focus of the interpretation although reference to the presence of specific slaves was made in the manor house, mill, and farm. These references used the names listed on the extant 1750 probate inventory and connected specific slaves to specific tasks. The commitment to Philipsburg’s slave history continued with the celebration of Pinkster, the

⁴⁷ Dan Eggen, “In Williamsburg, the Painful Reality of Slavery,” *The Washington Post*, 7 July 1999, A1.

⁴⁸ Stacey L. Howard, “Making Colonial Williamsburg Authentic: Not Until the 1970s were Visitors Offered A Look at Slave Life in the Town,” *Inquirer*, 18 June 1995, T01.

Afro-Dutch celebration of Pentecost. This annual festival, which continues even today, features African storytelling, the Children of Dahomey African dance and drum troupe, and a demonstration of African instrument making. While these interpretive changes and special programs demonstrated commitment to telling the history of slavery, administrators felt that the site needed to make a “wholesale commitment to restructuring the daily experience at Philipsburg Manor.”⁴⁹

The impetus for this change came in 1997 when Historic Hudson Valley applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a grant to fund a new interpretation. With funding, it was believed that Historic Hudson Valley could address some “interpretive shortcomings of the property” including its failure to interpret “the strong presence of enslaved Africans and African Americans on the manor” and “static period-room displays in the manor house...[that] gave the skewed impression that the house was a full-time domicile for the Philipse family instead of the occasional residence and important *business* center that it was.”⁵⁰ The goal of the new interpretation was clearly stated. Using the key themes of slavery, commerce, and cultural pluralism,

Philipsburg Manor, Upper Mills will set the standard for interpreting enslavement in the northern colonies. With a thought-provoking and hands-on approach, the site and its collections will enable visitors to better understand the varied individual relationships among slave, owner, and tenant, and the inseparable institutional relationships among enslavement, commerce and culture.⁵¹

The history of slavery at Philipsburg would be the dominant narrative of the third interpretation and would greatly change the museum’s relationship to its own history.

⁴⁹ “Interpretive Plan,” Distributed for staff of Philipsburg Manor, Historic Hudson Valley in December 2000, Philipsburg Manor Upper Mills, Tarrytown, NY, 2.

⁵⁰ “Interpretive Plan,” 2.

⁵¹ “Interpretive Plan,” 3.

The Interpretive Plan for Philipsburg was clear about its role as a response to the imperatives of social history and modern culture. Underscoring the uniquely modern circumstances of its construction, the Interpretive Plan proudly proclaimed that it would “undoubtedly be supplanted by a new phase when scholarship and public interest create the need for change.”⁵² Although less explicit, the influence of Colonial Williamsburg is also evident. Colonial Williamsburg’s “Becoming Americans” theme was echoed in Historic Hudson Valley executive Richard Parsons’s statement that the new interpretation gave “a clearer sense of how the country did come together on the backs of different cultures, with lots of diverse influences...the people can see in a more accurate and enlightened way how this amalgam of American reality is just that, not a product of one cultural strain.”⁵³ Parsons’s comments also point to the continued importance of the American narrative to Philipsburg’s story. Although the celebratory history of the past was long abandoned, changes in focus and methodology were still made relevant by references to the larger American narrative. Margaret Vetare, manager of reinterpretation for Philipsburg Manor, indicated that changing Philipsburg’s interpretation was essential if the site were to accurately convey the changing character of the American narrative, “This is an American story we’re telling, not someone else’s story.”⁵⁴

From the outset, Philipsburg’s decision to “set the standard for interpreting enslavement in the northern colonies”⁵⁵ was a lofty goal as the unique nature of slavery at Philipsburg and the lack of primary evidence about the site itself created a difficult set of

⁵² “Interpretive Plan” 2. Colonial Williamsburg made similar claims in its interpretive plan for the “Becoming Americans” theme. See *Teaching History at Colonial Williamsburg*.

⁵³ Sandee Brawarsky, “Plantation on the Hudson,” *New York Times*, 19 January 2003, 14 (1).

⁵⁴ Brawarsky, “Plantation on the Hudson,” 14(1)

⁵⁵ “Interpretive Plan,” 2.

circumstances for the reinterpretation. After all, no new primary source evidence on the slave experience at Philipsburg has been discovered since the probate inventory listing the site's slave property was found in the 1940s. When contrasted to Colonial Williamsburg, the paucity of information at Philipsburg is apparent. Not only was Williamsburg able to draw from a wealth of secondary sources for eighteenth-century Virginia slavery, but researchers were also able to uncover specific evidence concerning slave life and culture within their own holdings.⁵⁶ In contrast, Philipsburg's own training materials acknowledge that "the Philipse family's 'multiple location' slave holding – owning slaves in both the urban environment of New York City, and in the rural setting of Westchester County – created a set of circumstances for both slave and slave owner that was unique to Northern slavery."⁵⁷ Philipsburg's interpretation therefore, relied on general secondary material to describe a unique situation. In addition, their description of this atypical situation intended to create a picture of slavery across the Northern colonies.

These somewhat incongruous goals have greatly affected Philipsburg's most recent interpretation. In part, the lack of strong evidence for the site's primary focus has led to an ambivalent relationship with authenticity where the interpretation is aware of the limitations of its construction but still presents its narrative as fact. A brief examination of the training materials alongside a sample tour as laid out in the Interpretive Plan portrays this inconsistency. In a study used to provide guides with background information on Philipsburg's slave history, author Jacquetta Haley examined

⁵⁶ Eric Gable, Richard Handler, and Anna Lawson, "On the Uses of Relativism: Fact, Conjecture, and Black and White Histories at Colonial Williamsburg," *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 4 (Nov., 1992): 796.

⁵⁷ Dennis Maika, "Slaves and Slave Holding in New York's Philipse Family, 1660-1750" (prepared for Historic Hudson Valley September 1997), 1-2.

the slaves listed on the 1750 probate inventory. The speculative nature of her findings was evident: “‘Ceasar’ As the first adult male listed on Adolph’s inventory I have assumed that he was the most important of the men, the miller... ‘Dimond’ I have arbitrarily made Diamond the boatman...he was either one of the two farmers, or the boatman.”⁵⁸ The hesitancy of Haley’s findings disappeared in sample tours, however. The site introduction stated that “we will talk to you about the people who lived here – people like Caesar the miller who was responsible for taking the grain grown by local tenant farmers and grinding it into flour.”⁵⁹ Additionally, administrators suggested using the wharf as a setting for “a 1st-person interpreter in the role of Diamond, the enslaved boat pilot.”⁶⁰ The “facts” of the interpretation were passed on to the public. A *New York Times* article unambiguously stated: “The mill produces between 500 and 1,000 pounds of flour annually, which is about what Caesar – the miller in Philipse’s time – and his crew did in an hour.”⁶¹

The goals of the new interpretation have also led to changes in the methodology of interpretation. Following the example of Colonial Williamsburg’s “Becoming Americans” and later, “Enslaving Virginia” themes, Philipsburg introduced a story line “to help give shape and definition to the material...it is a tool that helps us *tell* the story at Philipsburg Manor.”⁶² Philipsburg’s administrators chose “1750: The Death of Adolph Philipse” as the storyline because of the existence of the 1750 probate inventory and the

⁵⁸ Jacquetta M. Haley, “The Slaves of Phillipsburg Manor, Upper Mills,” (prepared for Historic Hudson Valley, 1988) 23-24. Diamond’s name is spelled alternately “Diamond” and “Dimond” in Philipsburg’s interpretive materials.

⁵⁹ “Interpretive Plan,” 9.

⁶⁰ “Interpretive Plan,” 18.

⁶¹ Brawarsky, “Plantation on the Hudson,” 6.

⁶² “Interpretive Plan,” 5.

fact that the sale of slaves following Adolph's death presented an opportunity to portray "one of the most psychologically painful aspects of enslavement...uncertainty about one's own and one's family's destiny."⁶³ Administrators used the story line to remove much of the ambiguity from the interpretation and the training materials made it clear that guides would be judged on their consistency in portraying the message of the story line. Philipsburg's choice of story line, while perhaps necessitated by the available evidence, emphasized what may have been unrepresentative turmoil within the slave community.

In fact, historian Dennis Maika asserts:

The listing of twenty three slaves living at Adolph Philipse's Upper Mills shows signs of a stable, established community. The existence of slave families is clearly illustrated by the presence of eight children...Naming patterns also indicated the presence of families, some perhaps over three generations...The presence of an older population is also an indication of a more stable slave community.⁶⁴

Maika's statement shows that while sale and the threat of sale were constant for slaves, Philipsburg Manor also had an opportunity to talk about the building of slave communities and families. A concentration on 1750 however has relegated this aspect to a single mention.⁶⁵

Philipsburg's manor house tour represented another change in methodology. In contrast to many house tours, the manor house narrative is not focused on decorative arts but instead, it functions as The Other Half tour at Colonial Williamsburg does, using the historical settings as backdrops for a broad narrative of life at Philipsburg Manor. In fact, in some rooms antique furniture and objects have been replaced with reproductions to

⁶³ "Interpretive Plan," 6.

⁶⁴ Maika, 39.

⁶⁵ The suggested tour for the kitchen notes that family ties are suggested by the inventory. "Interpretive Plan," 25.

better illustrate Philipsburg's storyline. The interpretation of the dairy presents a good example of the place of slavery within the manor house tour. Filled largely with reproduction furniture and tools used in the making of butter and cheese, the room sometimes is used to demonstrate the process of dairying. These labor-intensive demonstrations however, are often impossible during the school year as the guides are too busy with school children. Thus, for a large part of the year, the dairy remains a static room display. After a brief description of the importance of Westchester dairy products in the New York City marketplace, the dialogue turns to a detailed description of dairying practices in African regions such as Angola, Ghana, and Madagascar. The Interpretive Plan included the following among its suggested information for the dairy: "Africans from the B'Kongo region of present day Angola and those from the so-called 'gold coast' centered around present day Ghana could not keep livestock because of tse-tse fly infestation...Some Malagasy and East Africans...had a long tradition in domesticating livestock."⁶⁶ The dairy, therefore, is for most of the year unconcerned with the process of dairying. Instead, it is used as an opportunity to talk about the potential places that the slave women may have originated and any dairying knowledge that they may have brought with them to New York. This emphasis on analytical narrative over artifact continues throughout the manor house.

Again, in the style of Colonial Williamsburg, Philipsburg's new interpretation has also incorporated vignettes or mini-plays that tackle various aspects of the subject. These 10-15 minute character sketches can be staged both in outdoor locations and in

⁶⁶ "Interpretive Plan," 23.

reproduction-filled rooms of the manor house. Four of these skits have been prepared. The first, entitled “Another Conversation,” revolves around an interaction between a tenant farmer and Caesar the Miller. In this sketch, the tenant farm family has recently purchased the land that they had been renting from the Philipses. Despite similar everyday material culture, this sketch points out the very different opportunities available for slaves and tenant families. A second sketch, “North and South” portrays a conversation between Frederick Philipse II and a prospective slave buyer. The skit shows the similarity in legal restrictions for both northern and southern slaves. “On The Run” is based on a documented instance of a runaway slave who was questioned at Philipse’s mill and “Trying Times” dramatizes the turmoil of 1750 by portraying the subtle negotiations that existed between slave and overseer as one worker tries to get leave to see his/her spouse who has recently been sold to New York City owners.⁶⁷ These sketches were arranged by pedagogical theme and not individuals or representative everyday situations. The pedagogical messages within these skits are immediately recognizable. The following statement in “North and South” is representative of the dialogue in the sketches:

In my many travels along the Atlantic coast I have observed that the acts regulating treatment of Negro chattel is nearly identical from Boston to Barbados...For example, no more than three Negroes may lawfully assemble here while in Virginia the number is four. In both colonies the status of a Negro child always reflects that of the mother and baptism shall not alter one’s position – all the same from colony to colony.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Descriptions of these sketches are taken from Michael Lord, “A(nother) Conversation,” “North and South,” “On the Run,” and “Trying Times,” (prepared for Philipsburg Manor in 2002), Philipsburg Manor Upper Mills, Tarrytown, NY.

⁶⁸ Lord, “North and South,” 4.

Each sketch also calls for a third person interpreter to take questions from the audience and clarify any uncertainty about its meaning.

These vignettes are illustrative of the interpretation of slaves and slavery as a whole at Philipsburg Manor. Each of these vignettes recreates a situation in slavery where the slave's status as object is underscored. For example, in "Another Conversation," Caesar tells a tenant farmer, "You know us slaves is property – and property can't be married legal-like. I don't have a wife ma'am. At least that's what Master Frederick said to me after he told me he sold Abigail to Mr. Myer of New York City."⁶⁹ Even in the moments when the slaves are negotiating their own destiny, the point of the skit is to make clear that above all, they are possessions. In a version of "Trying Times," Sue asks leave to see her husband John and proclaims, "Ever since Master Frederick took over from Master Adolph I have lost 10 members of my family. To you they were 10 hands...My husband John – sold. Sampson sold away from his son. Then little Sam...sold at the auction...at least you got a wife and children to go home to." While each of these vignettes is unique, the purpose, indeed the purpose of the entire Philipsburg reinterpretation, is to underscore that slaves were property. While this is a useful corrective to interpretations that only celebrate slave culture without delving into the meaning of enslavement, it fails to create a nuanced image of slavery. These vignettes could create a more sophisticated depiction of slavery if they featured dialogue among two or more of the Philipsburg slaves. This lack of attention to interactions

⁶⁹ Lord, "Another Conversation," 6.

between members of the Philipsburg slave community creates a single-faceted depiction of slaves.

Additionally, although slavery is the focus at most of Philipsburg's interpretive areas, the lower kitchen, dairy, and mill are the rooms that have an explicit link to the subject and the museum has no objects or places that were specifically acquired for the presentation of slave history. This is the case despite the fact that archaeological investigations located the possible foundation of a documented slave cabin on the museum's grounds. The decision not to recreate the cabin was based on authenticity:

After careful consideration and much debate, Historic Hudson Valley has decided not to construct a slave house because of the lack of historical information as to appearance and location. In the absence of evidence as to what the slave quarters looked like, how can we responsibly interpret its existence short of reconstructing a building based on no documentation?⁷⁰

The implication of this rationale is that the existence of a reproduction slave cabin, based on conjecture would render the otherwise authentic interpretation inaccurate.⁷¹

Philipsburg's reinterpretation already draws on evidence from broad regional sources, however, and the slave cabin would be no different. Furthermore, the existence of a slave cabin would create a physical manifestation of the slaves at Philipsburg. Even if grounded in speculation, a slave cabin would be an asset to Philipsburg's new interpretation by complicating the image of slavery at the site.

Currently, the interpretation creates an essential "slave" and an essential experience of "slavery." For example, individual experiences are so unimportant that two

⁷⁰ "Interpretive Plan," 29.

⁷¹ Lawson argues on page 299 that similar concerns were voiced over the building of the Carter's Grove slave cabins.

versions of each vignette have been written so that either a man or a woman can play the parts.⁷² In the vignettes and in the guides' dialogue, slaves are portrayed only in juxtaposition to their status as property, their white master, or their work. They are exclusively presented as agents of opposition who aided runaways, negotiated time away, and broke tools. The slaves at Philipsburg are also solely defined by their work: Caesar the miller, Diamond the boatman, Abby and Susan, the dairywomen. This characterization is in spite of the fact that these same people may have been mothers, fathers, and daughters to other people on the site. Thus, although names are used in connection with the slaves at Philipsburg, they are essentially interchangeable with one another because they all build on the same assumptions about what slaves were like. Philipsburg is one of many museums that "treat ethnic or racial groups as though they were monolithic."⁷³ Data from Philipsburg's visitor analysis, conducted to fulfill the requirements of their National Endowment for the Humanities grant, indicate that visitors would like to see another side to the slave experience. One visitor remarked, "It would be nice to recreate a slave house."⁷⁴ Several visitors, when asked if the staff addressed slavery "appropriately" commented that "it might be useful to include more on how the enslaved community might have felt (more from the slaves' point of view)."

⁷² Williamsburg has designated specific personalities with the slaves portrayed on first-person tours. These personalities vary from "surly" to "spunky" in order to portray a range of experience. Lawson, 191.

⁷³ Michael Kammen, *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 156.

⁷⁴ The data for the "Summative Evaluation Report" was compiled over 3 days in July and August, 2003. A total of 88 visitors were surveyed. See Ellen Leerburger, "Summative Evaluation Final Report: For Philipsburg Manor Upper Mills," Philipsburg Manor Upper Mills, Tarrytown, NY, 2.

Additionally, visitors felt the interpretation of slavery would be aided by the addition of more African-American staff members.⁷⁵

The Summative Evaluation Report clearly demonstrates that the value of Philipsburg's new interpretation lay in its ability to teach northerners about their region's own slave history. Joanne Pope Melish writes about this northern amnesia about slavery in *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and 'Race' in New England, 1780-1860*. Melish's argument, while confined to New England, is useful to this study. Melish argues that the post-Revolutionary War abolition of slavery in New England led to "a kind of erasure by whites of the historical experience of local enslavement...In its place emerged a triumphant narrative of historically free, white New England in which a few people of color were unaccountably marooned."⁷⁶ The results of the visitor analysis at Philipsburg Manor indicate that this argument can be extended to New York. When asked, "What are the most important ideas that you came away with today?" over one quarter of the respondents cited slavery. In addition, 34% of visitors said that the information about slavery in the North changed their understanding of colonial history. For some, the experience was startling and the comments included: "Slavery was a rude awakening," "Seeing the log of people, the shackles...at the end of the day, the slaves didn't go home," "Touched by the slaves in the basement...but it was enriching to see it," "Learning about slaves is shocking," and, "Disturbing how people were treated."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Leerburger, 12, 14.

⁷⁶ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and 'Race' in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1998) 3.

⁷⁷ Leerburger, 4; Leerburger, 11..

While the creation of the interpretation at Philipsburg is problematic for its lack of specific evidence, Philipsburg's value as an historic asset lies less in its own site's history than in its ability to teach a region about a forgotten aspect of its past. In this way, Philipsburg's interpretation is akin to the Park Service's narrative at Kingsley Plantation and the reasons behind this similarity are likely the same. Like Zephaniah Kingsley, the Philipses, while prominent in their time, are no longer an integral part of the American narrative. It is therefore a lot easier to use a site associated with them to introduce an interpretation that focuses on slavery. This is not the case at a home associated with the founding fathers.

Founding Slaveholders

Colonial Williamsburg's and Philipsburg Manor's raw treatment of slavery never found its way into the homes of several of the founding fathers. Instead, Monticello, and Mount Vernon introduced slave narratives that complicated the history told at their sites but did not affect the time honored reputations of the American heroes who lived in them. An overview of the tours at Mount Vernon and Monticello demonstrates that these museums' narratives resemble the Slavery Memorial at Mount Vernon writ large, acknowledging and discussing slavery but failing to provide a view of the founders as slaveholders.

The administration at Mount Vernon and Monticello approached the history of slavery in fits and starts during the middle of the twentieth century, never quite achieving any strategic plan about the topic. Mount Vernon archivist Mary Thompson explained the uneven progress of slavery interpretation as evidence of the site's "two minds" on the

subject saying that Mount Vernon, “While sometimes far ahead of other museums in acknowledging contributions of the enslaved community to the plantation,” has also “shared the concern of many historic houses, the homes of great men who founded and led our country, that talking about slavery would take something away from the memory of those men.”⁷⁸ This point is clearly demonstrated in the early slave interpretation at Mount Vernon. In 1962, for example, the MVLA rebuilt and interpreted a greenhouse that included slave quarters. The original building had burned in the 1830s. While this was an important step forward in slavery interpretation, the physical reconstruction of the greenhouse, and not any desire to interpret slavery, motivated the MVLA to make this addition to the Mount Vernon grounds. Furthermore, Mount Vernon’s own publication flatly states, “In hindsight...its authenticity remains in doubt,” citing the fact that the space was not interpreted to house as many slaves as would have lived there and “it is also questionable whether Washington would have allowed his carpenters to spend their time fashioning shaped headboards and finials to adorn furniture used by slaves.”⁷⁹ Of the rest of the interpretation at Mount Vernon before the 1980s, Mary Thompson has stated, “With the exception of the quarters, it was hard to see the presence of slaves anywhere else on the Mount Vernon estate. Slavery was not really discussed unless a visitor initiated the conversation.”⁸⁰ At Monticello, archaeologists began excavating Mulberry Row, the hub of Thomas Jefferson’s slave industry, in 1979. This excavation

⁷⁸ Mary V. Thompson, “Memorandum for: The Record. Slavery Research & Interpretation At Mount Vernon” 17 November 1999, MVLA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA., 1.

⁷⁹ James C. Rees, “Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Changing Interpretation of Slave Life On the Mount Vernon Estate,” in Philip J. Schwarz, ed., *Slavery at the Home of George Washington* (Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, 2001) 163-165.

⁸⁰ Mary V. Thompson, “Memorandum for: The Record. Summary of Slavery Research & Interpretation at Mount Vernon,” 10 November 1999, Corrected 3 March 2000, MVLA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA., 2.

would result in a numbered map that identified Mulberry Row as “the center of industrial and plantation life at Monticello.”⁸¹ Even as this excavation was taking place however, the site’s official guidebook favored euphemisms such as “skilled workers,” only mentioning the word “slave” once.⁸² Similarly, before 1986, guides used the term “servants” on the house tours to discuss the slaves.⁸³

Both Mount Vernon and Monticello began a more systematic approach to slavery interpretation in the late 1980s and 1990s. Mary Thompson characterized this decision at Mount Vernon as reflecting the realization “that the story of this place...cannot be told without also telling the story of the more than 300 people who also called it home.”⁸⁴ Historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists at Mount Vernon began serious research into slavery at the plantation in the 1980s and by 1991, they were ready to open a living history site to interpret Washington’s innovative farming methods. This site featured living history demonstrations of the work done by slaves, though it is unclear how explicitly this work was linked to slaves. Similarly, at Monticello, the Ad Hoc Committee for Interpretation decided that a “cultivation of the past which underscores the romantic, the reverential, the uncritical [is] the surest avenue for preparing a people for the hands of those who would manipulate them.”⁸⁵ In 1992, Monticello established an Advisory Committee on African-American Interpretation. This committee had an

⁸¹ Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc. “Report to the Ad Hoc Committee (1977 or 1978), 28, quoted in Linda D. Retallack, “Did it Happen? Does it Matter? The Controversial Interpretation of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings,” (Masters Thesis.: New York College at Oneonta, 2002), 19.

⁸² Frederick D. Nichols, *Monticello: A Guidebook* (Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., 1967), 53, quoted in Retallack, 22. The 1967 guidebook was reprinted in 1982.

⁸³ Conversation with John Rudder 11 November, 2005.

⁸⁴ Thompson, “Slavery Research & Interpretation at Mount Vernon,” 2.

⁸⁵ Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., “The Program,” 3, quoted in Retallack, 19.

immediate effect on the interpretation at the site because in that same year the TJMF decided to make slavery “a running theme on every tour” of the house. The head guide asked the staff to speak about Jefferson in the context of other wealthy slaveholders and suggested using the names of specific slaves in order to bring the enslaved community to life.⁸⁶

The most important innovations at both Mount Vernon and Monticello in the early 1990s were the seasonal daily tours that focused on the slave experience. These tours, begun in 1991 and 1994 respectively, offered visitors an in-depth look at the slaves who lived and worked on the plantation. These tours took place on the grounds of Monticello and Mount Vernon, creating a symbolic separation between the history of Jefferson and Washington inside the house and the history of the enslaved people on the grounds.⁸⁷ The tours at Monticello and Mount Vernon took their inspiration from The Other Half tour and the sites were in conversation with one another about strategies for interpretation.⁸⁸ Because of this, the tours at these museums followed the pattern set by Colonial Williamsburg. They discussed specific slaves and the work that they accomplished alongside a discussion of the places where slaves lived and worked. Like Colonial Williamsburg, both Monticello and Mount Vernon had the resources to carry out their ambitious interpretation of slavery as both Jefferson and Washington left

⁸⁶ Thompson, “Slavery Research & Interpretation at Mount Vernon”, 1; Rees, 169; Retallack, 23.

⁸⁷ See Eichstedt and Small, “Segregated Knowledge,” for additional sites that use this approach.

⁸⁸ Thompson, “Slavery Research & Interpretation at Mount Vernon,” 4. Thompson discusses contacting staff at Monticello and Mount Vernon in order to give the interpretive staff the skills they needed to talk about the “sensitive” subject of slavery. She specifically notes that the Mount Vernon interpreters spoke with the African American interpreters at Williamsburg about how to discuss these issues. Similarly, Williamsburg’s Rex Ellis served on the Committee on African-American Interpretation at Monticello. See Retallack, 23.

copious and accessible personal papers. In addition, the TJMF and the MVLA had the financial resources to pursue excavations of plantation sites associated with slavery.

Because of this, these museums were able to create a nuanced depiction of slavery within their slavery tours. For example, the tour at Mount Vernon was based on research into the following areas: slave work, methods used by Washington to control slaves, slave resistance, slave quarters, family life, private enterprise, recreation, diet, and clothing.⁸⁹

A newspaper article about interpreter Gladys Tancil, a descendent of a Mount Vernon slave, described some of the information on the tour:

The nearly self-sufficient plantation had skilled craftsmen, shoemakers, coopers, carpenters and field hands. They included the diminutive, fashionable Hercules, who ruled the kitchen with an iron fist; the resourceful Sambo Anderson, an African with magnificent tattoos, tribal scars and earrings who excelled as a carpenter and hunter and supplied the finest area restaurants with game.⁹⁰

The discussion of slavery at Monticello and Mount Vernon is therefore substantial but unfortunately, the dialogue about Jefferson and Washington as slaveholders features the same equivocation that characterized Anderson's speech at the slave memorial. In fact, while the Mount Vernon guidebook includes a lot of information about Washington's specific interactions with particular slaves, its only sustained discussion of Washington as a slaveholder follows the defensive pattern set by Anderson exactly.⁹¹ Similarly, the Monticello guidebook's description of the plantation, which is based on the same research as the Plantation Community tour at the site, begins its discussion of the enslaved community with a discussion of Jefferson. After establishing that Jefferson

⁸⁹ Thompson, "Summary of Slavery Research & Interpretation at Mount Vernon," 3.

⁹⁰ "Remembering Mount Vernon's Slaves," 3 February 1998, MVLA Archives, Mount Vernon, VA.

⁹¹ *George Washington's Mount Vernon: Official Guidebook* (Mount Vernon: Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, ca. 2006) 107. The guidebook's discussion of Washington's specific interactions with slaves includes items such as slaves selling produce from their own gardens to the Washingtons (p. 93).

inherited most of his slaves from his father and father-in-law, the text moves to his famously complicated relationship with slaves and slavery. Noting that Jefferson considered slavery an “abominable crime,” the text considers his involvement in ending the slave trade to Virginia and limiting its westward expansion. The most nuanced portion of this text, however, discusses Jefferson’s philosophical racism and not his actions towards slaves and slavery. This section begins by acknowledging that Jefferson was criticized for “taking no public leadership role in steps that would lead to the abolition of slavery.” Despite this public inaction, “He privately advocated a plan of gradual emancipation that included the proviso that freed slaves be removed from the United States.” As the text explains, Jefferson’s racism was the reason for this plan of emancipation: “In his *Notes on Virginia*, Jefferson expressed views on the natural inferiority of African Americans. Such opinions [were] at the root of his inability to envision a nation incorporating both black and white citizens.” Ironically, the text uses Jefferson’s racism as a way to mitigate the horror of slavery at Monticello saying that it “led him, like many other southerners of the Revolutionary generation, to adopt a paternalistic stance toward his own human property.” The text makes explicit the comparisons that many visitors would inevitably make between Jefferson and Washington: “Unlike George Washington, Jefferson did not free all his slaves, believing that giving freedom to ‘persons whose habits have been formed in slavery is like abandoning children.’”⁹² From this discussion of Jefferson, the text turns to the work and domestic life of the many enslaved people at Monticello.

⁹² *Monticello: A Guidebook*, 101.

Interestingly, the text *Slavery at Monticello*, which was published by the TJMF, goes into greater detail about Jefferson as a slaveholder than the guidebook does. Author Lucia Stanton, Senior Research Historian at Monticello's International Center for Jefferson Studies, discusses the way that Jefferson "distanced and dehumanized the black families of Monticello" by framing his interactions with them and thoughts about them only in terms of the work that they accomplished. Stanton cites Jefferson's description of his lifelong manservant Jupiter's death as an example. Jefferson evaluated his companion's passing in terms of his lost work saying, "I am sorry for him as well as sensible he leaves a void in my administration which I cannot fill up." Stanton also provides an overview of Jefferson's changing perspective on slavery, from a fiery revolutionary who remarked that slavery was "a bondage, one hour of which is fraught with more misery" than a lifetime of British tyranny to the man who wrote of slaves' inherent inferiority in *Notes on Virginia*. Stanton sums up Jefferson's evolution with, "He appears to have convinced himself that those who were, as he suspected in print in the *Notes on Virginia*, 'inferior in the faculties of reason and imagination,' and whose griefs were 'transient' might find happiness in a bondage mitigated by a benevolent hand."⁹³ The fact that Stanton's sophisticated treatment of Jefferson as a slaveholder was watered down for the site's official guidebook can mean two things. It is possible that Monticello intended to draw a broad outline of Jefferson and slavery in the site's official materials and offer interested visitors resources like Stanton's *Slavery at Monticello* as an

⁹³ Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, 4 Feb. 1800, DLC, quoted in Lucia Stanton, *Slavery At Monticello* (Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1996) 34; Peden, *Notes*, 139, 143 in Stanton, 34.

additional resource. Alternately, the version of history at the site may be constructed to preserve Jefferson's heroic nature and extend Monticello's tenure as a sacred place in American history.

Further compromising the interpretation of slavery at Mount Vernon and Monticello is the fact that little to no information about slavery is incorporated into the main house tour.⁹⁴ My experience with the house tours of these sites in 2004 indicates that they were still decidedly focused on the artifacts inside the house and the great men who owned them. The official guidebooks for Mount Vernon and Monticello reflect this image of the tours. At Monticello, for example, Jefferson and his inventions still take center stage in many of the rooms. A portion of the narrative from the Cabinet, or study, is a good example of the interpretation that runs through the house.

For convenience and comfort, he assembled a reading and writing arrangement in the center of the room that included a revolving chair, a writing table with a rotating top, a Windsor couch for resting his legs, and a revolving bookstand that could hold five open volumes at a time. Atop the writing table was a copying machine called a 'polygraph,' which duplicated Jefferson's letters as he wrote. At an architect's table brought from France, Jefferson designed the Rotunda, ten pavilions, and ranges of the "academical village" of the University of Virginia.⁹⁵

Of course, it is natural and fitting that Jefferson should be a major focus of the house tour at Monticello. This preoccupation with Jefferson comes at the expense of the enslaved population however, specifically the twelve domestic slaves who made Jefferson's household run. The passive language used to describe the work that enslaved people did in the dining room is one example of this tendency, "Two dumbwaiters, installed on either side of the fireplace, carried bottles of wine from the wine cellar below... When not

⁹⁴ The author toured both Mount Vernon and Monticello in January, 2004.

⁹⁵ *Monticello: A Guidebook* (Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1997) 48.

in use, the tables were placed against the walls. The tables were decorated with French biscuit figurines.”⁹⁶ Similarly, the dependencies below the main house, where the slaves worked in a smokehouse, kitchen, and winery among others are self guided while the rest of the house is guided with an interpreter.

The interpretation at Mount Vernon is similarly artifact oriented, using the objects in the house to explain the life and work of George Washington. The guidebook’s official description of a room known as “the passage” exemplifies this technique:

The passage, or central hall...extends the full width of the house from the front door on the courtyard side to the piazza overlooking the river. During the warm season of the year, it was the most comfortable room in the house, and the journals of General and Mrs. Washington’s visitors indicate that much of the informal social life of the home centered here.⁹⁷

The passage also contains the key to the Bastille, which was sent to Washington by General Lafayette in 1790. When I toured the house, the discussion of the key was the only allusion to the hypocrisy of Washington’s slaveholding. Noting that Lafayette called Washington the “patriarch” of liberty, our guide wondered what symbolism the key had for the enslaved people in the house.⁹⁸

The interpretations of slavery at Mount Vernon and Monticello provide a narrative of slavery on the grounds that is physically separated from the narrative of the founders in the house. When combined with the exclusive use of quotes that demonstrate Washington’s and Jefferson’s philosophical dislike of slavery, the interpretations fail to adequately connect the founders with the people they enslaved. In short, visitors learn

⁹⁶ *Monticello: A Guidebook*, 34.

⁹⁷ *George Washington’s Mount Vernon: Official Guidebook*, 44.

⁹⁸ Mount Vernon house tour, author’s notes, 12 January 2004, Mount Vernon, VA.

about the slaves and they learn about Washington's and Jefferson's dislike of slavery but they are not encouraged to critically examine the founders as slaveholders. In this way, Mount Vernon and Monticello perpetuate an exclusively celebratory narrative on their sites.

The Hemings-Jefferson Controversy and American Memory

The controversy that erupted after a 1998 DNA test to determine whether Thomas Jefferson fathered six children with his slave Sally Hemings demonstrates the continued centrality of the founding fathers to American identity and the difficulty that accompanies revisions to their reputations.⁹⁹ The story of Jefferson's and Hemings's alleged affair is an old one. It first came to the public's attention in 1802 when journalist James Callendar wrote of Jefferson that he "keeps, and for many years past has kept, as his concubine, one of his own slaves. Her name is Sally." In 1873, Madison Hemings, Sally's son, told a reporter that he had grown up knowing that Thomas Jefferson was his father.¹⁰⁰ These stories were largely dismissed until Fawn Brodie claimed the affair took place in her 1974 psychobiography of Jefferson entitled, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History*. Dr. Eugene Foster's November 5, 1998, article in *Nature* ostensibly put this issue to rest, finding that "an individual carrying the male Jefferson Y chromosome fathered Eston Hemings, the last known child born to Sally Hemings." For the Hemings descendents, the DNA results not only confirmed the family's longstanding oral

⁹⁹ See also, Lois E. Horton, "Avoiding History: Thomas Jefferson, Sally Hemings, and the Uncomfortable Public Conversation on Slavery," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, eds. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton.

¹⁰⁰ James Callendar, "The President, Again," *Richmond Recorder*, 1 September 1802, quoted in Retallack, 5; Reed, 8.

traditions but also represented an important part of the nation's history and they felt that "we have a responsibility to bring this up and talk about it."¹⁰¹

For the rest of the nation, Foster's revelation began a whole new round of controversy that centered on Jefferson's role in American national identity. An article that appeared several months after Foster's results were revealed clearly stated the emotions that surrounded the DNA results: "Was he the architect of American equality struggling with the question of slavery, or a slave owner who warned against race mixing while feasting on taboo sex across the color line? Or just another human specimen of contradictions?"¹⁰² The DNA results stirred conversations outside of the historic community in venues like *Oprah* which featured Hemings and Jefferson descendents together on stage and a 2000 CBS miniseries, "Sally Hemings: An American Scandal."

Jefferson's recognized descendents, who were organized into the hereditary Monticello Association, were of two minds about the DNA revelations. Lucian Truscott became the voice of the pro-Hemings descendents advocating that the Monticello Association should recognize their connection with Jefferson. Truscott even went so far as to invite the Hemings family to the Monticello Association's annual meeting in 1999. For Truscott, the relationship between the Hemings and Jefferson descendents was a microcosm of American race relations, "If our family opens up the door and lets the Hemings family in, it will be acknowledging that the third president of the United States has a white family and a black family. That would be the beginning of racial healing, not

¹⁰¹ "Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: A Brief Account," [on-line]; available from <http://monticello.org/includes/printpage.php>; Internet; Accessed 21 November 2005; "Hemings Descendant Addresses Crowd: Julia Jefferson discusses the relationship between president and slave," *The Skanner* (Seattle edition) X, 11 July 2001, 1.

¹⁰² "Grave matters at Monticello," *The Village Voice* 43, 5 January 1999.

only for the family but for the rest of the country.”¹⁰³ Other mainline descendents approached the DNA results more hesitantly saying, “We don’t want to say no to [Hemings descendents] right now, but we are not ready to say yes as of now. We want the opportunity to meet with them and discuss the measure thoroughly.”¹⁰⁴ For these descendents, the implications of the DNA testing disrupted their image of American history. As one descendent said, “Think of what this means, we’re being asked to say that one of the greatest Americans in history, the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence was essentially a rapist. Maybe that doesn’t bother other people, but I’m sorry, I’m not prepared to say that. The people here, in the association, we joined because we love Jefferson. We joined because we love America.”¹⁰⁵ The Monticello Association deliberated for several contention-filled years and their reluctance to accept the Hemings descendents into the Association became a symbol of American perceptions of race and national identity. As one newspaper editorial asked, “Which is it, that their perception of African Americans is so low or their pedestal of Jefferson is so high that they are willing to cling to a belief that Jefferson could not have fathered Hemings’ children? Regardless of the answer, it says a lot about their moral ambiguity and racial hypocrisy. African Americans helped build this country...and we are an intricate part of its history...And although not all white members of the Jefferson family are willing to admit it, African Americans are also part of the Jefferson family legacy. Knowing the

¹⁰³ “Future of Sally Hemings’ relatives, Jefferson status remains unclear,” *The Jacksonville Free Press* 14, 1 March 2000, 3A.

¹⁰⁴ “Guess who’s coming to Jefferson reunion? Descendents of Sally Hemings expected to attend gala at Monticello,” *Philadelphia Tribune* 115, 11 May 1999, 5A.

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Ferguson, “Jefferson Family Feud Mixes History, Race, Sex,”[on-line]; available from Bloomberg.com; Internet; accessed 6 May 2003.

truth paints a fuller, more complex picture of one of the political giants of early American history.”¹⁰⁶

The Monticello Association felt otherwise and following its own study concluded, “Only further historical and scientific research, which discloses new facts, could give a different and more definitive answer” to whether Jefferson fathered Hemings’s children.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore the Association voted 74-6 to bar the descendents of Sally Hemings from the Monticello Association. With this ban, the mainline descendents also banned the Hemings progeny from the family burial ground at Monticello. The former president of the Monticello Association, John Works, Jr. noted that the intent of the vote was “to kill [the debate] forever.”¹⁰⁸ In order to ensure that the issue remained dead, a Monticello Association member posed as a 67 year old descendent of a Monticello slave to gain access to a Yahoo! message board created for Hemings descendents. Her intent was to thwart the plans of any Hemings descendents who might try to come to the Association’s annual meeting.¹⁰⁹ Just as some saw the Hemings-Jefferson story as a potential source of unity for a nation historically divided by race, many saw the decision of the Monticello Association as evidence of the persistence of that divide:

Certainly [The Monticello Association members] are not the only Americans with a serious case of denialism and pretense about race and the family tree. Truth be told, few of us have mono-cultural blood coursing through our veins. Why it matters at this late date – why it matters so much that someone feels he needs to “kill” it – is a sad and sorry commentary on how little has changed since Thomas Jefferson walked the gardens at Monticello.

¹⁰⁶ “Jefferson family must accept new relatives,” *Philadelphia Tribune* 116, 1 February 2000, 6A.

¹⁰⁷ Craig Shirley, “Outside View: Issues of Jefferson’s Issue” (United Press International, accessed 13 December 2008); available from <http://www.upi.com/view/cfm?StoryID=11062002-122103-3380r>; Internet.

¹⁰⁸ “Slave descendants barred from Jefferson Family,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 16 May 2002, 6.

¹⁰⁹ “Family Fight hits Thomas Jefferson reunion,” *Miami Times*, 13 May 2003, 3A.

It says this much: While people can somehow keep a straight face and actually debate whether the Jefferson-Hemings pairing occurred and to what end – even in the face of unwavering oral history and scientific evidence – there can be no question that racism has a long and hardy lineage. It’s what made Sally Hemings a slave in the first place.¹¹⁰

The TJMF, for its part, took a middle road when it came to the controversy.

Before Foster’s report, the possibility of a relationship between Hemings and Jefferson was only discussed if a visitor asked a question. The Guides’ Manual offered the following response to the question: “While some historians have accepted the possibility of a connection, most scholars who specialize in Jefferson studies have found the case for such a relationship unpersuasive.”¹¹¹ After the findings became public, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation immediately convened its own panel of scholars to review the findings and when this panel concurred with Foster, the TJMF prepared a statement that was incorporated on every tour. Guides were instructed to say: “While not everyone agrees, the Foundation believes that Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson likely had an ongoing relationship and that at least one and perhaps all of her children were fathered by him. This is based on an assessment of all available evidence, including DNA research findings.”¹¹² This carefully worded statement clearly placed the Foundation as the source of the conclusions about Jefferson and Hemings, divorcing the guide from any responsibility for the information. To make guides feel even more comfortable with the discussion, the Foundation suggested that they familiarize

¹¹⁰ “Jefferson heirs keep worst of his legacy alive,” *Arkansas Times*, 10 May 2002, 54.

¹¹¹ Lucia C. Stanton, “The Hemings-Jefferson Controversy: A Brief Account.” March 1995, rev. November 1998, quoted in Retallack, 28.

¹¹² John Rudder, “Memo to Interpreters re: Notes from last night’s meeting” 20 July 2001, quoted in Retallack, 30.

themselves with important parts of the study and use the family sitting room to discuss Jefferson's white and black family.¹¹³

In addition to incorporating the Hemings-Jefferson discussion into the house tour, an Implementation Committee, drawn from several departments within Monticello, hoped to use the controversy to bolster the interpretation of slavery across the site. Recommendations included creating new signage at Monticello that more accurately represented the diverse population, revising the Plantation Community tour to better interpret the "complexity and intersection of white and black worlds at Monticello" and creating a new exhibit that would introduce visitors to the entire plantation community before they ventured to the historic core of the site.¹¹⁴ These concrete interpretive goals were interspersed among more narrowly focused research and training agendas that were meant both to better prepare the Monticello guides to interpret slavery and to introduce interested visitors to additional information about the subject.¹¹⁵ Many of these plans are still being implemented. Interestingly, the TJMF dropped the requirement for guides to discuss the Hemings-Jefferson controversy in 2001 and during my own tour, neither slavery in general nor the Hemings-Jefferson matter was discussed on the house tour.¹¹⁶ This fact suggests that by 2005, the guide staff at Monticello was no longer trained to discuss the Hemings-Jefferson controversy.

¹¹³ Retallack, 31.

¹¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., "Recommendations of the Committee for the Implementation of the Research Report on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings" 26 May 2000, 10, quoted in Retallack, 32.

¹¹⁵ Retallack, 31-33.

¹¹⁶ Retallack, 31. Retallack noted that her experience in October 2001 indicated that guides were still discussing the matter. This suggests that by my visit in early 2005, the guide staff had turned over and were no longer trained to include this discussion.

While Monticello's leap into a proactive interpretation of the controversy was spurred as much by Foster's DNA study as it was by fidelity to the truth, the presence of the affair on the site is a microcosm of many museums' attempts to tackle difficult issues within their boundaries. For many, this attempt to deal with uglier aspects of the nation's past represents a move toward a new definition of authenticity that applies not only to objects but the social and historical contexts in which they are discussed. For one columnist, this new definition of authenticity was neatly summed up by the "road apples" he encountered at Colonial Williamsburg. He discussed them saying:

Road apples.

That was my mother's euphemism for horse droppings. Road apples.

When I first, uh, stumbled upon them as I was strolling down the middle of Street in Colonial Williamsburg, I was – elated! Would you find road apples littering Main Street, U.S.A., in Florida's Walt Disney World? Never!¹¹⁷

The presence of road apples signaled a much larger change in museum interpretation, the abandonment of the "Disneyesque recreation of what was once the capital of the British colony of Virginia" in favor of an authentic recreation of the colonial era. In fact, the very title of the article makes this point, "Authenticity: Colonial Williamsburg Strives for that 18th Century Atmosphere, Right Down to the Road Apples." For this columnist however, the value of Colonial Williamsburg's new interpretation was not just in the road apples but in the stories that were told in the authentic atmosphere that they created,

¹¹⁷ "Authenticity: Colonial Williamsburg Strives for that 18th century Atmosphere, Right Down to the Road Apples," Associated Press article, *RoanokeTimes & World News*, quoted in Handler and Gable, 6. Handler and Gable use this article to discuss the public perception of Colonial Williamsburg's interpretive innovations of the 1990s.

specifically The Other Half Tour which offered tourists “an education about one of the sorrier chapters in the nation’s history.”¹¹⁸

As they always had, Colonial Williamsburg led the charge towards this new definition of authenticity among privately funded museums. Other museums such as Philipsburg Manor, Mount Vernon, and Monticello followed suit but slavery has proven to be an uncomfortable fit for many of these museums. For Philipsburg Manor, the lack of specific information or the artifacts to talk about slavery has done a disservice to the very history of slavery that the museum is trying to relate by creating a monolithic slave “character” on the site. On the other hand, both Monticello and Mount Vernon ably depict the individual lives and work of the enslaved population but fall back on the founders’ philosophical opposition to slavery instead of the daily reality of their lives as slaveholders. Even Colonial Williamsburg fails to discuss George Wythe, a minor historical figure for most Americans, as anything other than an enlightened man trapped by the established system of slavery. The separation of the site’s interpretation into house tours that focus on the history of the white family and grounds tours that focus on the enslaved population creates a boundary that further insulates men like Washington and Jefferson from the reality of slavery. The controversy surrounding the implications of the Hemings-Jefferson affair for Thomas Jefferson’s reputation or the new Social Studies standards that seemed to downplay the importance of George Washington show that these museums are a reflection of an American public that still draws inspiration and meaning from the founding generation. The state of slavery interpretation, in some ways,

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 6.

still resembles the 1983 slave memorial ceremony at Mount Vernon. Americans today are ready to embrace the contributions of enslaved people to American history and culture as long as it does not come at the expense of the heroes of American history.

CHAPTER 5

Slavery at “Tara:” Plantation Museums and Selling the Old South

In 2007, the artwork on Arizona brand Southern Style Sweet Tea featured a plantation with three figures in antebellum dress on the house’s porch and walkway (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Detail of the Arizona Ice Tea Image¹

The image sparked a controversy when an email petition was circulated calling for a boycott of the company. The author of the email identified himself as LaMar McGowan and described the label as featuring a plantation with “a white couple on the porch and a Black woman dress *{sic}* like Aunt Jamama *{sic}* walking away from the house.”

McGowan asked, “When did slavery become marketable?” and called for a boycott of the all Arizona products.²

¹ Denver Louis, “Arizona’s Sweet Southern ‘Racist’ Tea,” 19 February 2008 [on-line]; available from: <http://www.blackvoices.com/blogs/2008/02/19/arizonas-sweet-southern-racist-tea/>; Internet; accessed 13 January 2009.

² See “Label Unable,” 25 March 2008 [on-line]; available from: <http://www.snopes.com/racial/business/arizona.asp> for an account of the controversy including the original email. Additional information is also included on Shawn Williams, “Arizona Sweet Tea Working to Change Southern Style Logo Perceived as Racist,” 19 June 2008 [online]; available from: <http://dallassouthblog.com/2008/06/19/arizona-sweet-tea-working-to-change-southern-style-logo-perceived-as-racist/>.

McGowan's campaign inundated Arizona with concerned phone calls and emails. In answer, the company released a statement that in part, denied any intention to depict slaves on the label and instead blamed the controversy on the limitations of printed colors on the label artwork. The company also released its own image of the label which supported its claim. In truth, even the original printed label makes it fairly clear that the woman walking away from the house is not meant to be a Mammy figure but instead is fair skinned and dressed in a hoop skirt and bonnet.

Even though Arizona did not directly depict slaves and slavery on its label, the incident is still instructive as a lesson on the place of the Old South in American memory. McGowan's question, "When did slavery become marketable?" is a good one but it should be broadened. Arizona's decision to depict a plantation scene that evoked images of the Old South was a conscious one. Their response to concerned emails stated, "When we design a label, we must communicate to the consumer in a matter of seconds, what exactly is in the package." It continued:

We all know that Sweet Tea originated in the Southern United States. It was with this in mind that our graphic designers set out to design a label that would capture the beauty and majesty of the South. After much discussion, we all agreed that nothing is more recognizable in the South than the beautiful stately homes found throughout the southern states.³

Despite this explanation, Arizona's imagery went beyond a depiction of the "beautiful stately homes" to place that home in a specific temporal context by including figures in antebellum dress. By including this image, the company predicted that the American

³ See Shawn Williams, "Arizona Sweet Tea Working to Change Southern Style Logo Perceived as Racist," 19 June 2008 [online]; available from: <http://dallassouthblog.com/2008/06/19/arizona-sweet-tea-working-to-change-southern-style-logo-perceived-as-racist/>.

people would associate the home and people with an idealized image of the antebellum south such as is found in *Gone With The Wind*. In fact, forced to change its label design in response to the concerns raised by McGowan's email, the company still chose an image associated with the antebellum South, paddle-wheelers on a river. McGowan's question, "When did slavery become marketable?" should therefore be changed. If depictions of the Old South are marketable, what is the place of slavery within that commodified vision?

This question is not unique to mass market products like Arizona iced tea but also applies to historic house museums in the Deep South for whom tourists in search of Tara have been their bread-and-butter. As these homes struggle to stay true to their visitors' expectations, they are not immune from the pressures put on them by American culture and social history to address slavery within their interpretations. This chapter will use museums in South Carolina and Louisiana to understand the ways in which museums in the Deep South interact with a specific vision of the Old South that is typically nostalgic and idyllic. It will then address the place of slavery within these museum interpretations. Last, the specific challenges that museums in the Deep South have experienced as they attempt to interpret slavery is instructive of the general obstacles to including the narrative of slavery in plantation house museums in ways that are meaningful and inclusive.

The Old South as a Guiding Narrative for Plantation Museums

The marketing of the Old South as a tourist attraction began amidst other heritage movements such as the founding of Colonial Williamsburg and the move to save

Monticello and Mount Vernon and it was steeped in the same interwar anxiety about the rapid changes in American culture that characterized these contemporary movements.⁴ The Charleston preservation movement, in fact, began as an effort to save the historic Manigault House from being razed to build parking garages. In *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston*, Stephanie Yuhl examines the ways in which Charleston's elite preserved the city's historic structures in the 1920s and 1930s while promoting a specific vision of their southern past. While this vision was related to the Lost Cause mentality that celebrated southern military valor, it focused on the pre-Civil War civilian world. The preservationists had been raised on a specific vision of Charleston that manifested itself in their preservation work as a celebration of "a pre-Civil War past as a heroic time when Old World gentility, a successful plantation system, and revolutionary patriotism ruled supreme." By choosing to preserve those sites associated with this version of the past, the Charleston preservationists promoted a distinct and selective vision of the city's history. However ahistorical, this depiction of Charleston's past sold. The city became an attractive tourist destination in the 1920s and 1930s as patriotic tourists made pilgrimages to shrines of American history.⁵

⁴ Diane Roberts argues that the creation of a bucolic image of the Old South began in the mid-19th century as southerners consciously attempted to counter attacks on the South by abolitionists and depictions of the South in books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Southern authors printed their counternarrative in southern literary magazines and as books. See Diane Roberts, "Living Southern in Southern Living," in R.H. King and H. Taylor eds., *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1996). Similarly, David Blight asserts that "To this day, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, much of Civil War nostalgia is still rooted in the fateful memory choices made in the latter two decades of the nineteenth century." See David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 313.

⁵ Stephanie Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 25; Yuhl, 45; Yuhl, 36.

This nostalgic vision of the Old South has endured as the cornerstone of southern heritage and has become intertwined with a newer facet of southern identity. Historian James Cobb argues that the South's twentieth century commitment to segregation grounded southern identity in a resistance to all things northern. As the civil rights movement and advances in technology and industry made the region look more like its northern counterpart, southerners searched for a way to reinvent their regional identity. Cobb argues: "that search seemed to begin at the very end of the civil rights era with the cleverly commodified vision of southernness as it appeared in the comforting and aesthetically pleasing pages of *Southern Living* magazine."⁶ The magazine served as "a sort of how-to-do-it manual in living the southern good life" and instructed its readers on fashionable flowers for their gardens and new recipes that used traditional southern foods such as ham, okra, and grits.⁷ This new vision of southern identity married modern icons of upper-class status with Hollywood's images of the Old South. Articles on golf course communities and luxury yachts were intertwined with allusions to Melanie Wilkes as an example of southern graciousness and images of "self-assured, socially adept 'gentlemen' confidently surveying magnolia and crepe myrtle from their piazzas, julep in hand."⁸ Just as the early vision of Charleston's heritage was created by and for the elite, southerners grounded this new version of their identity in the lives of the upper class.

⁶ James Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 223. Cobb argues that for much of the 20th century, southern identity was oppositional in nature and grounded in resistance to anything northern.

⁷ Diane Roberts, "Living Southern in *Southern Living*," in *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Cultures* (London, 1996), 86 in Cobb, 223.

⁸ Jack Temple Kirby, *The Countercultural South* (Athens, Ga., 1995), 74 in Cobb, 224.

These elite constructions of southern identity that are grounded in the glorious vision of the Old South continue play a role in Charleston's depiction of its history and heritage. A brief survey of a single pamphlet on Charleston tourist attractions demonstrates the ways in which the history of the Old South has become intertwined with both Hollywood history and stereotypes of the southern good life. Several museums exemplify the early preservationists' association of Charleston with antebellum glory. Tourists to the Aiken-Rhett house are invited into "A time capsule of Charleston's antebellum grandeur" while the Edmonston-Alston House boasts that it was "one of the first dwellings built on Charleston's High Battery in 1825" and "is a gracious example of early 19th-century commitment to elegance, style and comfort." Glossy photos of immaculately appointed interiors and impressive architecture underscore these claims.

The advertisement for Boone Hall Plantation and Gardens situates the site as the center of southern history and heritage: "From before the birth of our nation, through the tumultuous years of Slavery and the Civil War, to America's oldest working Plantation, Boone Hall is a true-to-life stage of Southern History." Listing the many attractions at the site such as gardens, slave cabins, "excellent Southern cuisine" and "one of the longest and most dramatic 'cathedral-like' avenues of centuries-old oaks draped in Spanish moss" (but carefully avoiding any mention of the fact that the plantation home itself is a 1930s colonial revival structure), Boone Hall announces that "Boone Hall is your entryway to everything that represents Southern heritage." In addition, two separate tour companies make allusions to *Gone With the Wind* in their advertisements. A picture of Vivian Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara is used to advertise a tour with Charleston's Finest

Historic Tours complete with the tagline, “Frankly my dear, Charleston’s Finest gives you the real Charleston experience.” Similarly, a decidedly modern looking woman in antebellum dress advertises Charleston Tours’ “Gone with the Wind” tour of the city and surrounding plantations.⁹

Louisiana’s historic sites also exemplify many facets of this particular southern identity even though the fact that the territory was acquired by the United States in 1803 precludes any allusions to a rich revolutionary past. As early as 1947, tourists were traveling to River Road to experience “the pleasure of living, if only for a day or two, in [the] authentic early American atmosphere” of a typical southern plantation. In the 1980s, newspaper articles about the mansions along River Road were similarly imbued with an idyllic image of the Old South and found that the historic corridor “evokes the elegance and prosperity of that part of Louisiana before the Civil War. The road was once lined with grand homes and working plantations, live oaks and magnolias.” A state historian was unable to resist an allusion to a Hollywood version of the Old South. Acknowledging that “I hate to sound magnolia-mouthed,” she described one plantation as “the pinnacle of ‘Gone With the Wind’ plantation architecture.”¹⁰

This trend continues in Louisiana today. Though slavery and plantation agriculture are not mentioned as parts of the tour, Houmas House’s literature, for

⁹ “Official Tours & Attractions Guide to Charleston, SC” (Mount Pleasant, SC: Official Guides to Charleston, Inc., 2006), 10-12; “Official Tours & Attractions Guide to Charleston, SC,” 14, “Official Tours & Attractions Guide to Charleston, SC,” 17, 23.

¹⁰ Eleanor N. Knowles, “Glimpses of Old Plantation Life,” *New York Times*, 12 January 1947, ProQuest Historical Newspapers the New York Times (1851-2005) X15; “Antebellum Grandeur by the River” *New York Times* 14 August 1988, ProQuest Historical Newspapers the New York Times (1851-2005) XX20; “Plantation Owners Sell History to Preserve It,” *New York Times*, 17 December 1989; ProQuest Historical Newspapers the New York Times (1851-2005) 44.

example, boasts of the home's association with both "Wade Hampton, the largest sugar producer in Louisiana and the largest slave holder in the South" and John Burnside, "The Sugar Prince of Louisiana." Touting itself as "The Crown Jewel of Louisiana's River Road," the brochure states, "The Mansion and Gardens are a testament to the grandeur of an Era when Great Sugar Barons presided over Houmas House." These references to an idealized antebellum era end with an invitation "to tour the mansion with period dressed tour guides to experience the history and lifestyles of the Great Sugar Barons, sip Mint Juleps while strolling under the Ancient Oaks, relax in the Gardens at Houmas House."¹¹ Oak Alley Plantation's brochure exhorts visitors to "Enjoy Oak Alley's beauty and dream of her rich past while you step back in time as we tell you of Jacques' struggle between his love for the land and his love for his wife." Describing the typical stay at the "Grande Dame of River Road," the brochure states, "After your thirty minute, climate controlled guided tour of the 'Big House,' stroll through the grounds in the shade of majestic oak trees, while sipping one of our famous mint juleps."¹²

Several museums exemplify the kind of interpretation that relies on and reinforces this specific narrative of the Old South. The Edmonston-Alston House, prominently situated on Charleston's historic Battery, is an opulent nineteenth-century Greek revival mansion. While open for tours, the home, and presumably its valuable furnishings, are still privately owned by the Alston family. Whether or not the family exerts any influence

¹¹ "Houmas House Plantation and Gardens," brochure, 2006.

¹² "Oak Alley Plantation: A National Historic Landmark," ca. 2004, [brochure online]; available from oakalleyplantation.com. Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small discuss this kind of imagery in *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002) as part of a "larger romantic framework" for discussions of southern history. This framework leads to a focus on the lives and loves of the white plantation elite while neglecting the history of slavery. See Eichstedt and Small, 89-95.

over the interpretation is unclear.¹³ The tour at the Edmonston-Alston House focuses on architecture and decorative arts as an entrée into a discussion of the wealth and lifestyle of the Alston family in the nineteenth century. It also pays particular attention to the adaptations that Charlestonians made to their hot climate. Underscoring the importance of the antebellum era, the interpretation effectively ends with the Civil War even though the family continued to occupy the house into the twentieth century. The discussion of the Family Dining Room of the Edmonston-Alston House is illustrative of many of these points.

This is the Family Dining Room. The main meal of the day would take place here about three in the afternoon – it was a grand affair. They would dress formally and there were different courses of food and wine to go with it and it would last for several hours. The food was cooked in the kitchen in a building called a dependency – it was in the back. It is separated from the house. That was required by law because of fire. The food would be warmed in the room behind this called a warming kitchen before it was brought to the table. This table is a Duncan Phyfe – early 1800s mahogany. It has accordion legs and can be very narrow or very large. Over the sideboard, there is a convex mirror with candles on the side. The convex mirror actually reflects the candles. There are 28 candles when only 4 are lit. This didn't throw as much heat.¹⁴

The Edmonston-Alston House is not unique in its preoccupation with the antebellum lifestyle of the home's white family. The tour of Oak Alley in Louisiana, for example, is representative of many of the Louisiana plantation tours. Like the Edmonston-Alston House, it focuses on the prominent white family and their opulent life at the mansion. In the home's parlor, guests are told about the ways in which the mansion's architecture helped the Roman family to stay cool in the tropical climate. The

¹³ The museum is also a part of the Middleton Place Foundation which operates Middleton Place, another museum in Charleston, presumably because the Alstons and Middletons are related.

¹⁴ Author's transcription of a recorded tour of the Edmonston-Alston House, 24 January 2006.

guide also discussed that cypress wood was painted to look like marble because cypress, though readily available, was “a poor man’s wood.” Underscoring the romance and gentility of the Old South, the discussion of the parlor also included an anecdote about a “courting candle.” As legend goes, when a suitor called, a girl’s father would thread wax through a metal loop on the candle and nip the end. When the candle burned through the allotted wax, the suitor had to leave. Not all suitors were so well mannered, however. The guide remarked that one of the Roman daughter’s suitors called drunk. The girl was so upset that she ran up the stairs, cutting her leg on her hoopskirt and when the injury turned gangrenous, her leg was amputated. The experience apparently was transformative as the daughter then joined the Carmelite nuns.¹⁵

Sociologists Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small have argued that plantation museums “tell a particular type of story (white- and elite-centric) to a particular kind of tourist (white). The stories emphasize the hard work, civility, and ingenuity of plantation owners (who were almost invariably male) and provide a largely reverential characterization of gendered kinship relations in southern states.”¹⁶ Eichstedt’s and Small’s representation of southern museums certainly mirrored my own experiences in Charleston and Louisiana. The marketing and interpretation of museums in both of these locations demonstrates both the persistence of an idealized narrative of the Old South and southern culture, and the fact that this version of the South is appealing to tourists from across the nation.¹⁷ By consuming and internalizing a specific vision of southern

¹⁵ Author’s notes from tour of Oak Alley, 14 February 2006.

¹⁶ Eichstedt and Small, 6.

¹⁷ Yuhl argues that the elites of Charleston constructed a specific Charlestonian heritage that “influenced the way outsiders, especially visitors, would remember the city.” In this way, Charleston’s elite created a

heritage and bringing that history home to other parts of the country, tourists have incorporated those facets of southern heritage into a larger shared American identity. In this way, museums and their interpretations in the South have resonance that extends beyond the region. Americans in general have internalized an idealized and romanticized image of the Old South as part of a common (and appealing) past.

Because of the presence of the glorious Old South within a common American identity, the interpretations of slavery in these regions take on new meaning and import. At Oak Alley and the Edmonston-Alston House, there were no sustained discussions of slavery. In general, the tour guide at the Edmonston-Alston House used passive language that served to mitigate the work of enslaved people on the site using phrases such as “the dining room table...could be brought up here.”¹⁸ In other cases, the language of the tour implied that the Alstons were doing domestic work in the house. Such was the case in the drawing room where we were told “Mrs. Alston served tea to her family and guests every evening.” The only real mention of slavery at the Edmonston-Alston House came at the end of the tour as guests gathered on the porch to look out over the small urban compound. We were told that this was “a very typical backyard for Charleston.” Because the property provided the house with all of its necessities, it was known as an urban plantation, “Everything that made this household self-sufficient would happen in the garden down here. There was a vegetable garden and animals – chickens, pigs, goats, horses – the stables are there in the back.” From this general description of the yard’s

promoted their version of the city’s history to a national audience. Yuhl further argues that by emphasizing the city’s revolutionary history while promoting traditional symbols of southern identity, the city’s preservationists were able to place their southern identity within a broader American identity. See Yuhl, 13-14.

¹⁸ See also Thomas A. Greenfield, “Race and Passive Voice at Monticello,” *Crisis* 82, 4: 146-147.

function, the guide pointed to “the dependency,” noting that “the two upper floors are where the servants lived. There were sixteen servants when the Alstons were here.” Situated on top of the carriage house, we were told that the quarters were “considered fairly luxury accommodations for sixteen servants.” The guide then added, “I use the term servants specifically. At that time the family referred to those people that took care of the house and grounds as servants. You do realize that they were enslaved Africans prior to the war. Those on the plantations who worked in the fields were called field hands or slaves.”¹⁹ In an era when curators at sites such as Colonial Williamsburg value slave material culture more than the antiques of the elite, the current owner of the Edmonston-Alston house has effectively shut the door on future expansion of the slavery narrative by selling the slave quarters. The quarters have since been turned into an elegantly appointed bed and breakfast.²⁰

The bulk of the tour of the Edmonston-Alston House therefore, ignored slavery. The only discussion of slavery at the house acknowledged the presence of slaves but failed to discuss the experience of slavery or give the names of any specific slaves. The use of the term “servants” is particularly troubling and is, in fact, an indicator that the narrative of slavery at the Edmonston-Alston House reflected the Alstons’ nineteenth-

¹⁹ Transcription of a tour of the Edmonston-Alston House 24 January 2006. Other authors discuss the use of passive language and the term “servants” at museums that deal with slavery. See Eichstedt and Small,, 130-137 and Thomas A. Greenfield, “Race and Passive Voice at Monticello,” *Crisis* 82, 4: 146-147.

²⁰On Colonial Williamsburg and slave material culture, see Eric Gable, Richard Handler, and Anna Lawson, “On the Uses of Relativism: Fact, Conjecture, and Black and White Histories at Colonial Williamsburg,” *American Ethnologist* 19, no. 4 (Nov., 1992): 796; Many other museums also feature bed and breakfasts in former slave cabins although many of these predate scholarly interest in slavery. The bed and breakfast at the Edmonston-Alston House, 21 East Battery, opened in the last several years.

century point of view.²¹ Whether or not the Alston family called their house slaves “servants” is immaterial as the term is now an emblem of political incorrectness and out-of-date history. Additionally, the fact that the guide referred to the “luxurious” quarters situated above the horse stables is further evidence of this problem. While the Alston family and their contemporary nineteenth-century slaveholders may have considered those quarters “luxurious,” the guide seemed unaware of the irony of using that term after just completing a tour of the white family’s opulently appointed mansion. By describing the quarters in this way, the guide not only diminished the experience of slavery at the house but she also implicitly endorsed the Alstons’ view that they deserved their elegant home while the rooms above the stables were just fine for the slaves.

A similar narrative of slavery exists at Oak Alley Plantation. The majority of references to slavery in the house tour referred to anonymous “servants” who performed various tasks that made the life of the wealthy Roman family comfortable and elegant. Guests were told how servants would roll the moss beds for an hour each morning to get the lumps out and that the Roman children had a “day nanny” and a “night nanny.” The tour painted a particularly vivid image of slavery in the dining room where a large fan, called a punkah, was attached to the ceiling over the table. Guests were told that a “servant boy” would pull on a string that would operate the fan during the entire meal. In this instance, the “servant boy” was evidence of the opulent lifestyle of the Romans as the guide went directly from this discussion to talk about the silverware with the family’s crest engraved on the back. At the end of the tour, the guide pointed from the veranda to

²¹ Eichstedt and Small discuss this process of reporting the white family’s point of view as one aspect of “trivializing and deflecting the experience of enslavement.” See Eichstedt and Small, 150.

the site where the slave cabins would have stood. She remarked that the Roman family had just over 100 slaves and referred to an 1848 inventory that listed the names and value of each slave. Perhaps as evidence of the benevolence of the Romans, the guide pointed out that one fifteen-year-old girl, who was only worth twenty five dollars, was probably handicapped and that many of the slaves stayed on as sharecroppers after the Civil War.²²

The supplemental information on slavery that is available on Oak Alley's website is the site's gesture of inclusiveness but this information is both defensive about the South's complicity in the institution and solidly situated in the narrative of the Old South. The defensive tone of the document, entitled "Slavery at Oak Alley Plantation," begins by absolving the South from responsibility for the institution: "Human bondage has formed an unfortunate part of mankind's existence since the beginning of recorded history. There is nothing to justify it, but it has been present somewhere in the world in every culture, race and generation since time began." From this global perspective, the document turns to the antebellum south noting that "[slavery's] role in development and maintenance of the predominately agricultural antebellum South impacted an entire nation." While slavery "can be neither denied or condoned," it was "an integral part of the times and must be dealt with honestly and with candor." Interestingly, Oak Alley's own house tour does not deal with slavery with any candor and in fact denies the institution's importance in the life of the Romans.

²² Author's notes from tour of Oak Alley, 14 February 2006. Eichstedt and Small discuss the connection between discussions of the number of slaves who stayed on after the war and the benevolence of owners. See Eichstedt and Small, 151.

Nevertheless, the document soon turns to the specifics of slavery at Oak Alley including the fact that Jacques Roman purchased the home “with an already established sugar industry, livestock, and 57 slaves.” Acknowledging that many of these slaves built the plantation home, the document asks “What finer credit to their craftsmanship than that Oak Alley has endured through the years!?”²³

The remaining portions of “Slavery at Oak Alley Plantation” exemplify different aspects of the Old South imagery and serve to absolve the Roman family from any criticism for their slaveholding. In its discussion of the house slaves, for example, the document implies that the slaves were content with their positions as servants and happy to serve their white family, who were in turn dependent on them: “It was crucial to the demands of constant interaction between them and their master that a degree of confidence and mutual dependence prevailed that is difficult to imagine in this day and age of independence and self motivation.” This image of happy dependence is underscored by the depiction of the Roman family as slaveholders who “were noted for their benevolence and justice with their slaves, many of whom are on record as having been emancipated long before the Civil War had ever been contemplated.” As further evidence of their enlightenment, the Romans buried their slaves in hallowed ground, baptized them as Catholics, kept families together, and allowed slaves to develop their skills in horticulture or trade. The fact that this latter practice would surely have benefited the Romans is not discussed.

²³ See “Slavery at Oak Alley Plantation,” [on-line]; available from: <http://oakalleyplantation.com/individualPages/slavery/slavery.html>; Internet; Accessed 1 March 2006.

In addition, each time the document acknowledges the horrors of slavery, it follows this statement with a sentence that either negates the import of the previous statement or absolves slaveholders from blame for the horrors of slavery. For example, the document asserts that “Historical documents, personal testaments, and community lore vividly describe the humiliation, cruelty and terror of slavery and the effect on pitiful victims of such a system.” This overwhelming evidence is compromised by the next sentence: “Yet within this web of injustice and pain, may be found evidence that there were those who regarded their slaves with pride and affection.” This same narrative device is also found in a passage that places the Roman’s benevolence within a larger context of republican ideology. “The totally immoral concept that one can possess another human being prevailed among many, it is true, but from the very beginning of our nation’s colonization and search for freedom from tyranny, there was an innate sense that slavery itself was sinful, and he who gained a reputation for maltreatment of his slaves was openly scorned.” Historical inaccuracies aside, this statement supports the view that slavery was inherently benign. The inclusion of a “poignant tribute” from former Oak Alley slave Andrieu who, with his wife, “Lived well into the 20th century and often spoke of their master, his family, and life on the River Region plantations” provides evidence to support the image of the Romans as beloved by their slaves. The quote itself, it should be noted, is of dubious authenticity as the document attributes it to “River Region folklore.” Andrieu “allegedly remarked: ‘My master was very good; he gave everything. No one was too sick or too sorry or too poor for my master. He lived to make a smile come into somebody’s face. Oh! Surely my master is in heaven this day.

And, as for me, well, I am more of a slave now than then.” Andrieu’s remarks not only support the document’s contention that the Romans were beloved slaveholders, it also is evidence of aspects of the Lost Cause ideology that still guide the interpretation at Oak Alley. To be sure, the document’s discussion of Reconstruction as “the madness of haphazard reconstruction” that “wreaked havoc on former masters and slaves alike” smacks more of William Dunning’s 1907 interpretation of the era than contemporary scholarship. Furthermore, its contention that “a whole culture was swept into the uncertainty of a new way of life” by Reconstruction brings to mind the nostalgia for the antebellum South that is part of the both the Lost Cause and the Old South imagery.²⁴

As the Oak Alley narrative illustrates, African Americans have always been an integral part of the legend of the Old South in carefully constrained roles as faithful and loyal servants. The erection of the Fort Mill, South Carolina, monument to faithful slaves in 1896 and the Daughters of the Confederacy’s attempt to erect a Mammy Memorial in 1924 (see Chapter One) are just two instances of the creation and perpetuation of this stereotype. Stephanie Yuhl discusses this imagery as part of the creation of Historic Charleston: “Elite Whites appropriated black spirituals, folktales, voices, and images to weave an identity for Charleston in which African American primitivism served as a foil to white gentility.” While African Americans figured into the elite representations of Charleston, it was in stereotyped roles such as domestic servants and agricultural laborers

²⁴ See “Slavery at Oak Alley Plantation,” [on-line]; available from: <http://oakalleyplantation.com/individualPages/slavery/slavery.html>; Internet; Accessed 1 March 2006. See also William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction: Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (1907).

that subordinated them to the white community.²⁵ Similarly, by referring to anonymous slaves whose work supported the lifestyle of the Old South, the interpretations at the Edmonston-Alston House and Oak Alley perpetuate this image of slaves and slavery. Additionally, they reinforce the genteel image of the Old South by failing to recognize the brutal system that was at the core of the privileged lifestyle of the white elite.²⁶ The interpretations at the Edmonston-Alston House and Oak Alley Plantation are therefore primarily concerned with Americans' notions of the gentility and elegance of the Old South. While these museums minimally address the presence of slavery at their sites, they do so in a way that makes the slaves a part of an existing narrative of southern culture instead of using slave history to challenge that narrative.

While these two sites were unique in their almost complete disregard for the history of slavery at the site, Oak Alley Plantation and the Edmonston-Alston House represent extreme examples of interpretations that were common to almost all of the Deep South plantation museums in this study. These museums connected with a glorious and elegant narrative of life in the Old South and the gentility of antebellum culture.

Interestingly, the only museum that strayed from this image of the American South is only a short distance from Oak Alley in Vacherie, Louisiana. Laura Plantation avoids falling into a stereotypical image of the Old South because it is interpreted as a "creole plantation" which means "we're talking about the non-Anglo culture that was

²⁵ Yuhl, 14. Yuhl's discussion of artistic representations of Charleston is particularly illustrative of this depiction of black Charlestonians. Yuhl argues that these depictions of African Americans in historically subordinate roles actually served to help define and legitimize the existing racial hierarchy in Charleston in the 1920s and 1930s. See Yuhl, 53-87.

²⁶ The gift shop at Oak Alley Plantation sells both *Gone With the Wind* figurines and the children's book *Little Black Sambo* with its original illustrations.

flourishing out here before we became part of the United States with the Louisiana Purchase.” This creole culture blended Native American, European, and West African traditions into a uniquely southern Louisianan experience. The site’s tagline, “Where Louisiana is a world apart,” underscores the unique and exotic nature of its interpretation as does the fact that only French was spoken in the house until 1984, “If you didn’t speak French, you couldn’t get into the house, you had to stay out here on the porch.”²⁷

While many facets of the tour are similar to other historic house museums, Laura’s focus on Creole culture makes its slavery interpretation particularly interesting. The Laura Plantation interpretation casts the early period of slavery under French and Spanish rule as the era of benevolent slavery. This era was characterized by the existence of the Code Noir, a legal code regulating the treatment of slaves. The guide discussed the Code Noir saying, “For instance, when they [slaves] were weakened by old age or handicapped, they had to be cared for by their masters. And if they were treated inhumanely, they would be sent to the hospital and the master would be sentenced to pay for them. The very next article – ‘a slave who strikes his master or any member of the family resulting in bruise or blood would be put to death’. So, both sides of the spectrum.” The Code Noir was characterized by the guide as a golden age of slave-master relationships in Louisiana and the United States was cast as the story’s villain because in “1803, Americans come down. Americans see Code Noir and free people of color and they can’t believe the slaves are able to have these freedoms. So they begin to

²⁷ Author’s transcription of recorded Laura Plantation tour 15 February 2006; “Laura Plantation,” [on-line]; available from: <http://www.lauraplantation.com/>; Internet; accessed 20 January 2009; Author’s transcription of recorded Laura Plantation tour 15 February 2006.

change the law. Not just for the slaves but for the free people of color as well.”

According to the guide, American meddling in Louisiana slavery resulted in the 1811 Louisiana slave revolt, “The largest slave revolt in Louisiana history.” The revolt began when slaves from an upriver plantation began marching to New Orleans, gathering men, women, and children armed with makeshift weapons along the way. “By the time they got to the edge of the city, the army and plantation owners were waiting for them. They were executed, beheaded, their heads were put on pikes to line the river in New Orleans as a warning.” After this revolt, “Louisiana changed forever because before that time, people regarded each other as a black class.”²⁸ Casting itself as a “world apart” from the average southern plantation museum, Laura Plantation is unfettered by the traditional narrative of the Old South that is at the heart of other plantation museums and the site is conscious of the fact that “most plantations on the river talk about another point of view.” This focus on a non-Anglo culture has not led to a total abandonment of the benevolent slavery narrative but it has recast the United States as the villains of slavery as we now understand it.

The Challenges of Slavery Interpretation

At many museums a depiction of the antebellum South exists alongside earnest efforts to incorporate the history of slavery into the museum. The fact that these efforts were not able to displace an idealized vision of southern history and culture is a testament both to the importance of the Old South in regional and national culture and the

²⁸ Author’s transcription of recorded Laura Plantation tour, 15 February, 2006.

formidable challenges that museums face as they try to incorporate slavery into their interpretations.

The first challenge that confronts museums is the lack of extant slave material culture at many museums. There are virtually no written records left by slaves themselves and the physical remains of slavery have largely disappeared. Anna Logan Lawson's study of Colonial Williamsburg provides useful insights to evaluate the fact that many museums have few slave artifacts to use to illustrate their slave history. Lawson argues that because of a lack of authenticating documentation and artifacts, the slave narrative and those who portray slaves at Colonial Williamsburg have inherently less value to museum goers.²⁹ This view was made explicit by a dissatisfied tour member who said of The Other Half Tour, "It was really just a walking lecture... What were we seeing on this tour that had any particular relevance to the story we were being told about slavery, and especially about slavery in Williamsburg?"³⁰ Other museum studies underscore the importance of objects for museum interpretation. Michael Ettema finds: "In spite of all our idealistic intentions, it is an inescapable fact that museum visitors respond more directly and immediately to objects than to verbalized concepts." Because of an object's ability to excite a visitor, Ettema concludes that interpretations need to find a way to blend object with abstract analysis.³¹

Many sites have tried to overcome this interpretive obstacle by following Ettema's advice and using the physical structure of the house and the artifacts within it to

²⁹ Lawson, 217.

³⁰ Lawson, 126.

³¹ Ettema, 77.

tell the story of the enslaved population. The National Trust's Drayton Hall in Charleston, South Carolina is a good example of this method. Though not formally involved in the National Trust slavery initiative, Drayton Hall was part of the organizational conversations about slavery interpretation and received a visit and evaluation from historian John Schlotterbeck as part of the program. Before the Slavery Interpretation Initiative began however, Drayton Hall staff had already been at work developing the slave narrative at their site for almost a decade.³²

The Drayton Hall staff, together with the National Trust, has made slavery a part of the most common visitor experience at Drayton Hall, the house tour. As is the case with many National Trust sites, each Drayton Hall guide develops his/her own house tour within the guidelines set forth by the site. The 2005 training manual for the tour sets forth the following guidelines for the interpretation of slavery in the house. "1 - Do not use the word 'servant' when discussing slaves, unless you use the term 'enslaved servant.' 2 - Make sure that your guests understand that there were not just house or field slaves at Drayton Hall, but artisans and craftsmen as well. 3 - Learn some of the names of the slaves. 4 - You will need to discuss slavery in one form or another at least four times in your tour."³³ These mandates ensure that while guides at Drayton Hall focus on different themes - preservation, women, family, or economy, for example, to tell the story of the house and property, slavery will always be a part of the story. In some cases, the guides use the physical structure of the house to talk about the experience of slavery.

³²John Schlotterbeck to Susan Schrieber et. al., "Report on Drayton Hall," Email Memo, 4 November 1999, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative - John's Memos, National Trust Archives, National Trust Offices, Washington, D.C.

³³ Craig Hadley and Peggy Reider eds., "Drayton Hall Museum Educators Training Manual," Vol 3, 31 October 2005, p3, Drayton Hall offices.

Our guide, for example, pointed out a dark staircase as “the staircases used by slaves” and noted that “they were not allowed to use the main staircase unless something wouldn’t fit. They would take food from the kitchen outside up these stairs and into whatever room the Drayton’s were using to eat it. We can imagine how dark that staircase would have been.” As the above example demonstrates, the guide’s use of active language makes a dramatic difference in the interpretation. The guide also talked about slavery in more abstract terms, however. In the “gentlemen’s room,” for example, she noted that the Draytons would have “been talking about the Revolution in this room in the 1770s” adding, “They would have been considering their own freedom while looking at their own slaves in the fields – this seems strange.”³⁴ The guide blended discussions of slaves and slavery that connected to the extant physical structure with more abstract questions about the meaning of slavery in Revolutionary America to provide a sophisticated, if brief, depiction of slavery at Drayton Hall. The site’s tour guidelines however, ensure that even the most harried Drayton Hall visitor will emerge from the tour with the knowledge that a skilled enslaved population provided the labor that supported the Drayton family’s lifestyle.

At Boone Hall Plantation and Gardens, also in Charleston, the museum has the opportunity to interpret a “slave street” on their site. This slave street contains six cabins that were likely built for skilled and domestic slaves. Several of the cabins contain exhibits that are meant to give insight into the lives of slaves on Boone Hall Plantation. Guests are guided to the slave cabins at the end of the house tour and our guide provided

³⁴ Author’s transcription of tour of Drayton Hall, 23 January 2006.

a brief overview of what was contained in the cabins saying, “You can look through the slave cabins – the 2nd one has a sweet grass basket exhibit – a craft developed by slaves in this area, passed down from mother to daughter. The third has reproduction furniture of what would have been here when the slaves were living here.” The guide told us that “between ten to sixteen slaves lived in each cabin – typically two families” although this information was not posted near the cabins.³⁵

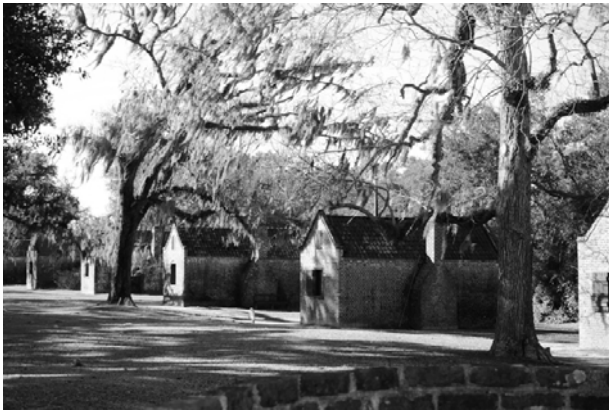


Figure 3: Image of the Slave Street at Boone Hall Plantation³⁶

The slave cabins at Boone Hall exemplify some of the methods for interpreting slavery that have become standard parts of museum representations. In the first of these methods, the art of discovering history becomes history itself as the exhibits focus on the archeological digs that were conducted at slave cabins. At Boone Hall, a sign tells visitors at one cabin that archeologists began excavating the site in 2003 and found many artifacts associated with the slaves and tenants that resided in the cabin. The sign asserts, “These artifacts and features are our window into the lives of the former enslaved Africans who lived here.” This small introductory panel is complemented by a larger exhibit panel that describes the archeological process including definitions of artifacts,

³⁵ Author’s transcription of recorded tour of Boone Hall Plantation, Charleston, SC, 24 January 2006.

³⁶ Boone Hall Slave Street, author’s photograph, Boone Hall Plantation, Charleston, SC, 24 January 2006.

stratigraphy, and archeological site. Presumably, the information from the 2003 archeological dig formed the basis for the next panel entitled, “Buried in the Ground.”

While this panel reiterates the importance of archeology for understanding the daily lives of the enslaved, the information presented is disappointingly general. For example, in discussing slave cabins, the panel states,

Slave cabin construction varied greatly across the south. Cabins were constructed of brick, logs, planks, or tabby. Size and style of construction also varied. Some cabins had a single room, while others had two rooms separated by an open breeze-way (a dogtrot cabin). Cabins also were arranged with two rooms back to back (a shot gun cabin). At some archeological sites, the foundations of former slave cabins are still visible. At other sites the cabins are gone completely and are revealed only through the excavation and discovery of soil features like the post and builder’s trench seen in this cabin. Standing cabins like the ones at Boone Hall are rare.³⁷

This general tone is repeated in discussions of slave food, cabin interiors, and colonoware or slave-made pottery common in the low country. The exhibit at Boone Hall therefore tells the visitor more about the process of discovering the history of the enslaved than it does the actual history of the slaves at Boone Hall Plantation.

In addition to these text panels, information and materials from the archeological digs informed two visual exhibits at Boone Hall. The first of these is the furnished slave cabin. The cabin fits the archeological exhibit’s description of pictures of slave cabins, which stated that a small bed, mismatched furniture, dishes, and tools were commonly featured in these cabins.³⁸ Despite this fact, the cabin did not match the guide’s description of a house meant for ten to sixteen people. The addition of a large

³⁷ “Buried in the Ground,” exhibit panel, Slave Cabin at Boone Hall, from author’s photograph.

³⁸ “Buried in the Ground” exhibit panel, Slave Cabin at Boone Hall, from author’s photograph.



Figure 4: Interior of Boone Hall Slave Cabin³⁹

armoire used for storage seems an extravagant use of space. Combined with the lack of any sleeping mats or pallets for the remaining ten to fourteen people who would have called this cabin home, the overall interpretation of the cabin runs counter to the guide's description of its use for two families. Additionally, there was no signage at the cabin to demonstrate that even this modest level of comfort was reserved for skilled and favored domestic slaves.

³⁹ Boone Hall Slave Cabin, author's photographs, Boone Hall Plantation, Charleston, SC, 24 January 2006.

The material from the archeological dig is also featured in a separate exhibit. Unlike the reproduction materials in the slave cabin, this exhibit features actual artifacts uncovered during the investigation. The accompanying signage for these artifacts



Figure 5.4 Slave Artifacts at Boone Hall⁴⁰

explains the archeological process by which ceramics are dated and identifies these items as representing materials from both the slaves and tenant farmers who inhabited these cabins.

Archeology and the display of archeological discoveries are common in plantation museums.⁴¹ While an interesting addition to interpretations, they are problematic when they constitute a major part of the site's slavery interpretation. If, as Michael Ettema asserts, artifacts are what excite visitors, how excited will the average person be at a display of broken pottery? When compared to the opulent and meticulous recreations of the house interior, these artifacts and the history associated with them pale by

⁴⁰ Boone Hall Slave Artifacts, author's photographs, Boone Hall Plantation, Charleston, SC, 24 January 2006.

⁴¹ Mount Vernon and Monticello both display archeological evidence in their visitor center. Arlington House includes information from archeological investigations in its interpretation of one of the slave cabins, as well.

comparison. Of course, the material culture of the enslaved will never match that of the enslaver. Museums can use this difference in material culture however, to make a powerful statement about slavery. Instead of (or in addition to) discussing the archeological process, museums could make explicit comparisons between the lifestyle of the white family and that of the enslaved. By reinforcing the fact that the labor of the enslaved supported the opulent lifestyle that the visitors just witnessed in the house tour, the lack of material culture can actually demonstrate the inherent injustice of slavery. Without such statements, however, it is likely that the memory of the pot shards and empty slave cabins pales in comparison to the luxurious lifestyle exhibited in the plantation house. In this way, museums such as Boone Hall Plantation, though making an effort to tell the story of slavery, do little to subvert a glorious and romantic image of the Old South.

Closely related to this problem of a lack of material culture is the fact that almost no museums offer guided tours of the slave cabins as part of the tour of the main plantation house.⁴² A lack of staff and visitor time are generally the reasons behind this decision. By offering guided tours of the house and self guided tours of the slave cabins and work spaces, museums reinforce a hierarchy of southern history that privileges the history of the enslavers over that of the enslaved. Boone Hall presents an interesting example of this tendency. Even though the slave street at Boone Hall is very rare, especially in Charleston where both Civil War damage and numerous hurricanes have

⁴² When I visited Laura Plantation in 2006, the main house had been damaged by a fire and by Hurricane Katrina and was not open to the public. At that time, the main tour included the slave cabins. Now that the main house is open again, the website indicates that the grounds are self-guided. In other museums, guided tours of the slave cabins were only offered as part of a separate African American history tour on the plantation.

destroyed most slave cabins, the museum offers a guided tour of the plantation house only. This is despite the fact that the plantation house itself is a 1930s Colonial Revival version of a plantation home. The museum, therefore, offers a guided tour of the recreated history of the plantation house while neglecting the rare and authentic slave street that is on the site.

Middleton Place in Charleston presents an interesting example of the use of signage versus guides to present an interpretation of slavery. The plantation was the home of several generations of the Middleton family including Arthur Middleton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. While the main house and many outbuildings were burned by the Union Army during the Civil War, the site now includes a spacious guest wing that survived the war, a recreated plantation stableyard, as well as the extensive gardens that are the museum's main draw for visitors. Curator Tracey Todd described the house tour: "The focus is on the white Middleton family – telling their story through the decorative arts collection that's there." To Todd, the history of the Middleton family is the American story, "This is the home of Arthur Middleton – signer of the Declaration of Independence, another [Middleton] was an ambassador to Russia...there is a great story to be told here of American history." Like Drayton Hall however, Middleton Place has incorporated discussions of the domestic slaves into the house tour by acquiring objects such as a Middleton slave tag, which was worn by slaves to identify

them as Middleton property when they left the plantation, that highlight the history of slavery.⁴³

While Middleton Place does not have a slave street like Boone Hall, it does interpret Eliza's House, a "freedman's dwelling" from the 1870s.⁴⁴ The house consisted of two units, each of which included a common room and a small bedroom. A center chimney divided the units. When the house was first built, it was occupied by two former Middleton slaves, Ned and Chloe Brown and by the 1920s and 1930s, the Middletons' cook Mary Sheppard lived there. The site is named for its final owner, Eliza Leach who was employed at Middleton Place with her husband. Eliza Leach occupied the house until 1984.⁴⁵

In a manner that is reminiscent of Kingsley Plantation, Middleton Place administrators have used Eliza's House to give a fairly comprehensive view of slavery. The exhibit in the house opened in 2004. Intricately detailed and illustrated exhibit panels discuss topics with the following titles, "African Homelands," "Capture and Enslavement," "Middleton Family Plantation System," "Clothing: Adapting to a New Life," "Labor Never Ending," "Culinary Traditions," "Leisure," "In Sickness and In Death," "Quest for Freedom," "Freedom's Coming," and "Pioneering African American Interpreters." The exhibit panels begin with a description of life in West Africa and then quickly move to the slave trade. The panel on the slave trade, for example, details the growth of the African slave trade as American demand for slaves grew. To describe the

⁴³ Tracey Todd, interview by author, transcription of recording, Charleston, SC, 23 January 2006. Tracey Todd is now Vice President of Museums for the Middleton Place Foundation.

⁴⁴ Middleton Place offers an African American focus tour that was not running while I was there.

⁴⁵ "Stableyards Outline," Middleton Place Foundation, Charleston, SC, 5.

Middle Passage, the panel uses a quote from a trader detailing the food needed for a slave ship with five hundred slaves: “[ships] lose one half to two thirds [of the slaves to starvation] before Barbados – the *Albion* [one of his ships] 60% capital loss for want of proper food.” The panel also notes that a member of the Middleton family imported slaves directly into Charleston before the American Revolution.

The remaining panels detail life on a low country plantation and are careful to recognize the skills and traditions that slaves carried with them to Charleston from Africa. For example, the description of health and healing at Middleton includes a discussion of traditional and effective African traditions alongside a description of “modern” nineteenth-century western health care practices. When possible, the exhibit panels use the stories of specific slaves in the exhibit panels. The panels also include a “warts and all” interpretation of the Middleton family citing numerous slaves who ran from the plantation during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Additionally, its interpretation of Reconstruction at Middleton includes an image of plantation scrip and a Freedman’s Contract from Middleton Plantation, noting that these two items “extended into freedom a type of bondage very similar to slavery.”⁴⁶

The Eliza’s House exhibit provides a relatively complete and nuanced image of slavery at Middleton Place and nicely integrates the general history of slavery with more specific images of the lives of enslaved people at Middleton Place. Unfortunately however, in order to tell this story, Middleton has populated Eliza’s House with densely filled exhibit panels. As Tracey Todd noted, the extensive gardens are the main draw for

⁴⁶ “Capture and Enslavement,” Eliza’s House, Middleton Plantation, SC; “Freedom’s Coming!,” Eliza’s House, Middleton Plantation, SC.

the site's 100,000 visitors each year. In addition to these gardens, the guided house tour, working plantation stables, marsh tour, and carriage rides all compete with Eliza's House for the visitors' attention. Since many Charleston visitors seek to immerse themselves in the romance of the antebellum era and not text panels about slavery, it is likely that many guests do not take the time to read and contemplate the extensive information in Eliza's House. After all, museum visitors generally "have been accustomed to informal, leisurely, and primarily visual museum experiences and will not read exhibit texts," which have been categorized as "books on walls." Posting a guide at the house to answer questions and spur visitor interest may make the exhibit more interesting for the average guest.⁴⁷ The Eliza's House exhibit would have more resonance for visitors if the text panels were grounded in material culture displays (even if they are reproductions) such as the type of cloth used for slave clothing, examples of colonoware, or tools used for growing rice. Additionally, providing recorded examples of the local Gullah dialect or slave spiritual would not require Middleton Place to exhibit hard-to-find slave artifacts but would still use the power of historical objects to make the text of the exhibit more powerful and meaningful for visitors.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ettema, 77; See also Warren Leon, "A Broader Vision: Exhibits That Change the Way Visitors Look at the Past," in ed. Joe Blatti, *Past Meets Present*. Leon argues that because museum visitors are generally passive, they do not take in the complexity of exhibits. Peggy Rieder, a lead interpreter at Drayton Hall, commented that many visitors choose not to take the Drayton Hall "Connections" tour because they are attempting to see numerous plantations in one day and do not have the time.

⁴⁸ Michael Ettema suggests that the correct use of artifacts can effectively communicate the abstract historical ideas of social history. He uses the example of Plimoth Plantation to discuss the ways in which the museum has used reproduction objects to give an unromanticized view of everyday life for the colonists that is "accurate and convincing". Combining this kind of visual representation with contextualizing analytical information would be a worthwhile approach to Eliza's House. See Ettema, 73-84 for his discussion of Plimoth Plantation and the importance of integrating analytical and material culture interpretations.

While many visitors may miss or only peripherally experience Eliza's House, the plantation stables are a central part of the Middleton Place experience. The stables include live farm animals and living history displays of historic crafts such as candle making, dyeing, blacksmithing, and woodworking. As Middleton Place's souvenir booklet describes it, the stables include "reminders of an era during which the economy of the Carolina Low Country depended on its natural resources and the cultivation and harvesting of crops."⁴⁹ Costumed guides demonstrate a selection of the historic crafts each day and are available to answer visitor questions. The guides, who were all white when I visited, make it clear that the work they are demonstrating would have been done by enslaved people. To underscore this point, the signage around the stable always depicts black figures completing the work that is discussed on the sign.

In a counter example to the interpretation at Eliza's House, the guides at the Middleton Place stable focus on the crafts that they are demonstrating to the relative exclusion of the social and historical context of those crafts. For example, in discussing candlemaking, the guide stated, "These were everyday candles for the house. The slaves used this – a grease pot – you put cooking grease in and you would light the wick. If [the Middletons] had company, they would use these candles – again, only in the house, made out of tallow of the sheep and the lye. But the way they got their lye was they would put the ashes from the fire in here, pour water over it, and it came out [here]."⁵⁰ John

Schlotterbeck visited Middleton Place in 1999 while he was working on the National

⁴⁹ *Middleton Place* (Charleston: Middleton Place Foundation, ca. 2004), 39.

⁵⁰ Author's transcription of tour, Middleton Place, 23 January 2006. The guide's use of "they" to describe the work done on the plantation is common among many house museums. Eichstedt and Small discuss this practice alongside the use of passive voice as a way that museums erase the history of slavery at their sites. See Eichstedt and Small, 134-137.

Trust's Slavery Interpretation Initiative. While Eliza's House was not open at that time, Schlotterbeck reported his impression of the stableyard in an email to the National Trust. Schlotterbeck's experience matched my own and he found that the guide staff was "very knowledgeable and acknowledged that slaves would have performed these tasks." He continued, saying that the stableyard's focus on the self-sufficient plantation economy "left the impression (dangerous in my mind) of black and white harmoniously living together to create this wonderful place. There was no acknowledgement of slaver *{sic}* master relationship as one of power or of the existence of conflict or even that slaves have lives of their own."⁵¹ While the Eliza's House exhibit was all context without any material culture, the stableyards took the exact opposite approach to slave history. These two experiences however, have very different resonance even for the visitors who choose to take part in both of them. The interactive and object-driven interpretation of the stableyards has more of an impact on visitors than the static signage of Eliza's House. By integrating these two interpretive areas, Middleton Place could produce a richly detailed interpretation of slavery at the museum that will inform the average visitors understanding of slavery on a low country plantation.

As it stands now, it seems as though Middleton Place's interpretation does little to alter the average visitor's vision of the Old South. A sample of visitor reviews of the plantation indicates that the Old South structured many visitors' experiences at the museum. In truth, Middleton Place itself gives visitors this image by saying the site "epitomizes the grace and grandeur of the southern plantation of the 18th and 19th

⁵¹ John Schlotterbeck to Susan Schreiber et. al., "site visits" email, 29 December 1999, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – John's Memos, National Trust offices, Washington, D.C., 1.

centuries.”⁵² One reviewer exemplified this view of the museum and advised guests to “leave enough time to experience the serenity of an age gone by.” Many reviewers mentioned only the house tour and the gardens in their reviews of the site. Even those who took in the history of the site seemed overwhelmed by Old South fantasies such as this visitor who was left daydreaming about the elegance of antebellum life: “This plantation is deep rooted in history and the Guides were all very knowledgeable. Each guide dressed in the appropriate attire of their various trades making the experience so much more authentic. Not only did we leave much more knowledgeable about plantation life but I just loved the grounds. The property is so beautifully maintained you can almost imagine some of the parties that were held in the English gardens.” Another visitor, dissatisfied that the plantation house was no longer standing, unfavorably compared her experience to images from *Gone With the Wind*, “There were originally three houses and two were burnt down. The tour is of a small, dark, unimpressive house. Do not expect to see ‘Tara’ from ‘Gone with the Wind’ because you will be very disappointed like we were.” In a telling review, one visitor specifically discussed learning about slavery at the museum when she noted that Middleton “reeked of history; of the American Civil War, of Southern gentry and of course slavery.” The inclusion of slavery however, did little to change her experience of being “lifted to a time that one reads about in period pieces or sees in epic films like dare I say *Gone with the Wind*.” Favorably comparing her experience at Middleton to a recent visit to Versailles, this visitor noted, “As Versailles is a tribute and monument to the aristocracy of France, Middleton Place does the same to

⁵² *Middleton Place*, 5.

the genteel bourgeois lifestyle of the Old South derived not from cotton but from a rice plantation.”⁵³

Museum experiences are also shaped as much by the interaction between guides and visitors as they are by the administrative policies of the museum itself. This is another challenge to interpreting slavery at plantation museums. Tracey Todd discussed the problem of getting guides to deliver new information in the tour at Middleton Place: “Almost all of our guides are volunteer docents and there are positive and negative aspects to that. We have three volunteers that have been here since 1974. And many of them have been here fifteen to twenty years. And when you’ve been giving a tour that long and new information is researched and directors want you to incorporate new information, it’s hard...we’re talking about one hundred guides that give house tours. You can’t get them all in a room. You can’t get them all to read the guide’s letter.”⁵⁴

During his work with the National Trust, John Schlotterbeck came to the conclusion that

⁵³ New England Visitor, “Middleton Place,” review left 31 March 2008 [on-line]; available from: http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g54171-d144683-Reviews-Middleton_Place-Charleston_South_Carolina.html; Internet; accessed 26 January 2009; RustyandMe, “Middleton Place,” review left 2 September 2008 [on-line]; available from: http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g54171-d144683-Reviews-Middleton_Place-Charleston_South_Carolina.html; Internet; accessed 26 January 2009; Bongo1578, “Middleton Place,” review left 16 August 2008, [on-line]; available from: http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g54171-d144683-Reviews-Middleton_Place-Charleston_South_Carolina.html; Internet; accessed 26 January 2009; peewee54, “Middleton Place,” review left 17 September 2008 [on-line]; available from: http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g54171-d144683-Reviews-Middleton_Place-Charleston_South_Carolina.html; Internet; accessed 26 January 2009. Tripadvisor.com is a site offering traveler reviews of hotels, attractions, and restaurants. The reviews are voluntarily posted on the site. In total, there were 47 reviews of Middleton Place left on the website. Few of them mentioned the slavery interpretation. I have corrected the typos that appear in the reviews.

⁵⁴ Tracey Todd, interview by author, transcription of recording, Charleston, SC, 23 January 2006.

delivering the interpretation requires “making sure guides give inclusive tours to the public.”⁵⁵

The problem of having guides give an accurate interpretation is compounded in southern plantations where both guides and a large number of visitors may have been raised in a tradition that runs counter to the slave narrative at the museum. Schlotterbeck, for instance, noted that discussions of slavery in Drayton Hall and Louisiana’s Shadows-on-the-Teche (referred to as Shadows) would “be more obviously charged than in more northern and urban/suburban locations.”⁵⁶ This statement was informed by the surveys that National Trust sites filled out in preparation for the Slavery Interpretation Initiative. In answer to the question, “How comfortable are the guides at interpreting slavery and responding to visitor questions?” both Drayton Hall and Shadows reported that the majority of their guides were comfortable with the subject although they each noted telling exceptions. Drayton Hall’s administrators found that “roughly 20% of our interpreters feel less comfortable raising the subject [of slavery] than others.” At Shadows-on-the-Teche, one of site’s most active guides told another staff member that “people don’t want to hear about that [slavery]” and actively opposed several slavery interpretation programs including a project that charges local high school students with creating a slavery tour for the home.⁵⁷ Pat Kahle, Shadows-on-the-Teche’s director,

⁵⁵ John Schlotterbeck to Susan Schreiber et. al., “report on Shadows on the Teche” email, 15 October 1999, 2, in Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – John’s memos, National Trust office, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁶ “Interpreting Slavery at National Trust Sites”, 9, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Slavery Site Surveys, National Trust offices, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁷ “Interpreting Slavery Questionnaire Responses,” 3, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Slavery Site Surveys, National Trust Offices, Washington, D.C.; “Interpreting Slavery at National Trust Sites Questionnaire & Needs Assessment – Shadows-on-the-Teche” 28 August 1998, 3, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Slavery Site Surveys, National Trust Offices, Washington, D.C.

noted that “southern plantation slavery and 20th century racism are so closely associated that many people (both visitors and interpretive staff) don’t want to talk about it.” The guide at Laura Plantation in Louisiana similarly noted that the site “had a hard time getting tour guides who were born and raised out here to tell it [the slavery interpretation] because there’s so much shame still involved in this.”⁵⁸ Even the most prepared and gifted guide will find it difficult to confront visitors with entrenched views on the slavery interpretation. Drayton Hall staff have found, for example, that some African American visitors have viewed the site as a “place of oppression” and advocated tearing it down “brick by brick.” In other cases, visitors have made inappropriate comments or jokes about slavery.⁵⁹ Even a well-meaning visitor can derail a slavery interpretation with a misguided comment.

The interpretation of the plantation house at Shadows-on-the-Teche exemplifies the problems of getting guides to deliver the interpretation and the impact that other visitors can have on a tour. Guides at Shadows develop their own tours but are trained to include slavery in the discussion. Copious documentation left behind by the Weeks family, the sole owners of the property before the Trust acquired it in 1958, gives some insight into slavery at Shadows and includes information about specific slaves. In answer to the National Trust survey question “what are the main ideas having to do with slavery

⁵⁸“Interpreting Slavery at National Trust Sites Questionnaire & Needs Assessment – Shadows-on-the-Teche” 28 August 1998, 3, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Slavery Site Surveys, National Trust Offices, Washington, D.C.; See “Interpreting Slavery Questionnaire Responses,” Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Slavery Site Surveys, National Trust Offices, Washington, D.C. for a discussion of the relatively comprehensive training programs offered by these sites.

⁵⁹“Interpreting Slavery Questionnaire Responses,” Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Slavery Site Surveys, National Trust Offices, Washington, D.C., 3, Colonial Williamsburg noted instances of visitors making inappropriate comments about slavery when they began interpreting the subject throughout the museum. See Chapter 4. Author’s transcription of recorded tour of Laura Plantation 15 February 2006.

that you want people to come away with?” Director Pat Kahle noted the importance of personalizing the story of slavery and stressing the fact that the wealth of the Weeks family depended on the work of their enslaved laborers. Kahle talked about preventing “interpreters from trivializing the past and presenting generalized stereotypes of slavery” because slaves “were individuals with individual skills, making particular contributions to the operation of the plantation.” By including this information alongside discussions of slave community and family, Kahle believed that Shadows could “present a balanced picture of the history of the site...and help our guests understand the whole story.”⁶⁰

The well-meaning guide on the tour that we experienced incorporated slavery into the tour but failed to live up to the standard expressed by Kahle. In introducing the site, the guide acknowledged that the Weeks were “sugarcane farmers” with a separate plantation on Grand Cote Island, approximately fifteen miles south of Shadows. After introducing the members of the white family, she asserted: “they had about three hundred people working for them, slaves, you know. They didn’t use the term slaves back then. Field hand or house servants pretty much outside or inside. But I’ll try not to use that.”⁶¹ A majority of the slaves, we learned, resided on Grand Cote as part of the sugarcane plantation but fifty slaves lived at the Shadows.

Most of the tour focused on the Weeks family and the architecture of the house although slavery was referred to several times. The first of these references took place in the kitchen where the guide discussed the discomfort associated with cooking over a hot

⁶⁰ “Interpreting Slavery at National Trust Sites Questionnaire & Needs Assessment – Shadows-on-the-Teche,” 28 August 1998, 3, Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – Slavery Site Surveys, National Trust Offices, Washington, D.C.

⁶¹ Author’s transcription of recorded tour of Shadows-on-the-Teche, 13 February 2006.

fireplace in Louisiana and then noted, “You would do a lot of your, um, the workers would do a lot of the food preparation inside the pantry where it’s cooler and you’d only come out here to cook.” From this discussion of “the workers,” the guide pointed out where the slave cabins would have stood. The original cabins are no longer standing and one reconstructed cabin houses the restrooms for the site. In her discussion of the housing, the guide noted that the cabins were brick and commented “that’s not too common for most of their – you know- cabins.” Falling back on the terminology she tried to avoid, she added, “House servants were probably treated better than your average field hands, you know? But also...you wouldn’t want to have a wooden cabin behind your house...I think that’s probably the real reason. But they were lucky, you know?”⁶²

The majority of the rest of the tour focused on the Weeks family. The guide took a moment to show a picture of Louisa Bryant, the “number one house servant,” who “pretty much ran the household when Mary [Weeks] wasn’t here.” Noting that Louisa and her mistress were the same age and had children at the same time, the guide surmised that they “weren’t friends but they were peers.” Unfortunately, the use of the word “peer” implies an equality that is fundamentally at odds with slavery. Even without this incident, the discussion of slavery on the tour was cursory at best. Instead of Kahle’s individualized image of slavery as the backbone of the white lifestyle, the tour merely listed the numbers of slaves and referred to one favored slave. In addition, the guide’s discussion of work at the household was task oriented and when she referred to slaves, it was using the terms “servant,” “field hand,” or “worker.” My impression matched

⁶² Author’s transcription of recorded tour of Shadows-on-the-Teche, 13 February 2006.

Schlotterbeck's assessment of the site in 1999 when he noted that he was "disappointed by the guided tours...While slavery and the A[frican] A[merican] presence was still acknowledged...the tour still centered around the Weeks family and artifacts in the room."⁶³

This interpretation therefore did little to dispel the image of the Old South that rests on a belief in its benevolent slavery. An exchange between our guide and another visitor only compounded the issue. The guide, noted that some of the "people" came back to the Shadows after the Civil War because "they were very well treated by the family...They're the leg you stand on, you know? Your workers." The visitor added, "There's a misconception that slaves were, by nature, abused. The very idea of slavery is abusive but the actual treatment was not as bad as people think. Because, like you said, you don't beat your horse." Over the chuckles of the remaining visitors, the guide added, "It's true."⁶⁴ A glance at any recent scholarship about slavery exemplifies that this statement is fundamentally inaccurate. In addition to its inaccuracy, statements like this one are counterproductive to the work that museums like Shadows are trying to accomplish because they reinforce old ways of thinking about slavery. Guides, of course, do not want to make visitors look or feel like fools but statements like these should be diplomatically corrected and not, as was the case with this guide, supported.

Some missteps like the above incident at Shadows-on-the-Teche may not be due to the guide's own bias or background as much as they are to the available evidence.

⁶³ Author's transcription of recorded tour of Shadows-on-the-Teche, 13 February 2006.

⁶⁴ Author's transcription of recorded tour of Shadows-on-the-Teche, 13 February 2006; John Schlotterbeck to Susan Schreiber et. al., "report on Shadows on the Teche" email, 15 October 1999, in Folder: Slavery Interpretation Initiative – John's memos, National Trust office, Washington, D.C.

Average slaves rarely left any written evidence of their lives. Museum administrators therefore rely on secondary resources to provide the context for slavery at their museum. For specific information, museums often turn to the records of the white family. Of course, the white family's records only offer one view on slavery at the plantation. If guides and administrators do not read these sources with that prejudice in mind, the view of the white family is presented unfiltered to visitors. In her discussion *Shadows's* training, Pat Kahle noted that the guides use a variety of the Weeks Family Papers to understand slavery at the site. Of course, the family likely viewed themselves as enlightened slaveholders and this view of the plantation structured the guide's perception of the master-slave relationship. This was certainly the case at the Edmonston-Alston House where a woman selling tickets asked if I had been to the Smithsonian Museum's slavery exhibit and seen a quote from an Alston slave complaining about his master's abuse. The guide indignantly asserted that the Smithsonian was wrong to use the quote because they have evidence that the Alstons were good owners and felt that treating their slaves well led their slaves to work well for them. So, she remarked, "I thought well, that was *one* disgruntled slave."⁶⁵

This lack of evidence can influence even the most earnest slavery interpretations, however. At Drayton Hall, for example, the most extensive information about the African American population is available through a twice-daily program entitled "Connections." This 45 minute tour is included in the ticket price but is optional for visitors. It looks at the connections between Africa, Europe, and America and gives special emphasis to the

⁶⁵ Conversation with Edmonston-Alston House guide, author's notes, Edmonston-Alston House, Charleston, SC, 24 January 2006.

experience of African Americans. Interpreters use a variety of pictures, primary documents, reproduction materials, and actual artifacts to give an in-depth look at the African American experience in South Carolina.⁶⁶ “Connections” interpreters do not shy away from the uglier aspects of plantation life. Information about the middle passage, task system, and punishments meted out by the Drayton family are standard parts of the tour. For example, the guide noted that a strict set of rules governed slave life at Drayton Hall. These rules include posting a watchman to guard the plantation and requiring that all the tools be locked away at the end of the day. As the guide explained it, the reasons for these precautions were “self-evident – you didn’t want somebody that might want to kill you wandering around the plantation at night.” The guide also noted that whippings were meted out for “petty faults and not finishing tasks” but that slaves received “no more than twenty lashings unless master was present.”⁶⁷

Despite the impressively researched and detailed information presented on the tour, the use of evidence from the Drayton family to describe their own slaveholding seeped into the guide’s discussion. These depictions of the Draytons were somewhat at odds with the obvious conflict that is inherent in the above examples. For example, after discussing an inventory of slaves and the relative value of different slaves, the guide launched into a discussion of how the slaves were treated at Drayton Hall. She stated that based on oral histories and the diaries of Charles Drayton, “We think the slaves were treated pretty well. Charles often talks about the slaves running away but I haven’t come

⁶⁶ Peggy Reider, Interview with Author, author’s transcription of recording, Charleston, SC, 23 January 2006.

⁶⁷ Author’s transcription of “Connections” tour, Drayton Hall, Charleston, SC, 23 January 2006.

across any time that he punished Toby for running away. Toby always came back...So, Charles didn't really punish his slaves much – at least not that we know about.” In a discussion of the task system and the ways in which it allowed slaves to hunt or grow their own food after their daily task was completed, the guide noted: “Some rather unscrupulous slaveowners would use that as an excuse to provide their slaves with less...that didn't happen here as far as we can tell but it did happen some places.”⁶⁸

At Laura Plantation, the copious evidence left by the white family has allowed them to present a slightly more nuanced picture of slavery. The tour of Laura Plantation is guided by the family's records, which include the memoirs of Laura Locoul, a member of the last of four generations of the family to live in the house. Laura Plantation's interpretation discusses Elizabeth Duparc, the plantation's matriarch and business manager, as a callous slaveowner. The tour discusses how she sent her son to France because “she couldn't stand the sight of him. She said he was weak and turning into a negro spoiler – He wouldn't beat the slaves hard enough is what it came down to.” Additionally, the tour talks about Elizabeth's purchase of 30 “young women for breeding” that yielded “what she calls her ‘crop’ of children” ten years later. Even this discussion of Elizabeth does not liberate Laura Plantation from a narrative of benevolent slavery, however. Instead, Elizabeth is cast as a villain against which the other members of the family are contrasted. The following example where Elizabeth sold a favored slave thus separating her from her young son ably demonstrates this practice by

⁶⁸ Author's transcription of “Connections” tour, Drayton Hall, Charleston, SC, 23 January 2006.

contrasting Elizabeth with her son, Emile and his wife, Désirée. After seeing Elizabeth with the slave trader,

Désirée – she can't let this happen. She loves Anna, she knows Anna. She's been a nurse here in the house for her and the baby. She goes back in and hollers for Emile. And she goes to him and tells him what she's seen and she says "Emile, you gotta go out there and stop your mother. Anna's been a saint to us. Why in the world would she be doing this ". So Emile, remember he's not the strongest against his mother. But he's fired up with paternal feelings. And he goes out that door and runs smack dab into Elizabeth. And it's too late. She's already got the money in her hand and she's counting it and he knows there's no bargaining with his mother. So he goes back in and gets some money...He buys Anna back. Elizabeth is so mad – not just because her son defied her but because Emile paid twice as much to get her back. So she's had it with him. But Anna stays right here. Right then, it was the Civil War...Emile comes back 2 years later..doesn't know what he'll find here. The first person who greets him is Anna. And she falls right to her knees and asks him if she can stay. She wants to repay him for his kindness. And Emile had her stay and Anna stayed right up until his death. And at his funeral, she made the same proposition to Laura and Désirée and stayed till Laura sold this place. And my favorite part of the story is that when Laura is married...she says that Anna stood at her right during the ceremony as a member of her family. So here you have these two factions, Elizabeth who used to walk back and forth on this gallery cussing. She'd say her rosary, she'd see somebody lazin' around out here and she'd cuss and scream and then go right back to saying her rosary. So, Laura, she's seeing these things, she's hearing these things, and she knows that she doesn't want to be a part of this.⁶⁹

In this instance, Elizabeth becomes the representative of the cruelty of slavery against which the rest of the household resists. As proof of their charity and the love that existed between the family and their slave, the thankful Anna is incorporated as a member of the family.

Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small discuss the common practice of framing the white family at plantation museums as "good owners" as one of several ways that museums trivialize the experience of slavery. While this is an accurate depiction of the

⁶⁹ Author's transcription of recorded Laura Plantation tour, 15 February 2006.

effect of this practice, its cause is more complex than a simple disregard of slavery.⁷⁰ In trying to present an accurate and fulfilling image of slavery at plantation sites, museum administrators look for ways to individualize the slaves. When working for the National Trust, John Schlotterbeck recognized the importance of focusing on “real people and their stories,” using the model of Colonial Williamsburg as an example. In order to accomplish this, however, museum administrators turn to the documentary record left by the white plantation owners where the only reports of the lives of individual slaves come from their interactions with the slaveowners. This circumstance of the evidence has several effects. First, the slaveowners’ views emerge unfiltered in the guides’ interpretations. Second, the individual slaves that the tours discuss are most often the favored slaves who worked in the house or had particular skills. The experience of Shadows-on-the-Teche, Drayton Hall, and Laura Plantation indicates that this is an issue even for those sites that actively seek to provide a balanced interpretation.

Whether they are consciously trying to recreate the mint julep culture of the Old South or making earnest attempts to uncover a more authentic narrative of plantation life, museums in the Deep South do little to separate their visitors from existing notions of the grace and gentility of the antebellum South. This shortcoming is in some ways understandable as most tourists visit the large plantation museums expecting *Gone With the Wind* and not *Roots*. Additionally, the very inequality that is at the heart of the slave experience further complicates the interpretation of slavery by providing very little written or material culture record of the experiences of average slaves. Museums often

⁷⁰ See Eichstedt and Small, 161-165

choose between entertaining their visitors with craft demonstrations that are divorced from discussions of enslavement and underwhelming their visitors with text-heavy and analytical approaches to the system of slavery. In the end, the challenges and methodology used to interpret slavery at southern plantation museums acknowledge slavery without using its history to alter twentieth century conceptions of the Old South. In this way, museums represent the modern vision of the South that is depicted in the pages of *Southern Living* magazine where, despite rare depictions of elite black southerners, “Blacks are still invisible men (and women) in the New South they helped to build.”⁷¹

⁷¹ Diane Roberts, “Living Southern in Southern Living,” in R.H. King and H. Taylor eds., *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 95.

EPILOGUE

Museums are not the only American places that have a difficult time talking about race and slavery. Indeed, one needs only to look at the 2008 Presidential election for additional evidence of the importance of slavery in the modern United States. Even as Barack Obama tried to avoid a discussion of race in the early campaign, the media repeatedly aired the anti-American (and anti-white) preaching of Reverend Wright and *The Washington Post* wrote articles detailing Michelle Obama's slave ancestry.¹ Even the liberal *New Yorker* was criticized for its depiction of Barack and Michelle Obama as terrorists on its front cover.² Meant to be an ironic commentary on the racist stereotypes lobbed at the candidate and his wife, the illustration instead became another example of the difficulty that Americans have talking about race.

For many, the election brought the uncomfortable questions that museums have been dealing with for several decades into the forefront of American culture and it appeared as though the legacy of slavery had irreparably cleaved the nation into black and white. Some were relieved when Obama's election in November was heralded as the beginning of a "post-racial" America but instead, the event only changed the nature of the discussion. The *Boston Globe* published an article marking the historic nature of Obama's inauguration by commenting that the steps on which he would take the oath of office and the house in which he and his family would live were built (and sometimes

¹ See Shailagh Murray, "A Family Tree Rooted in American Soil: Michelle Obama Learns About Her Slave Ancesters, Herself and Her Country," *The Washington Post*, 2 October 2008, C01.

² See *The New Yorker*, 21 July 2008.

staffed) by slaves.³ While *Globe* writer Michael Kranish entitled the piece with the uplifting, “At Capitol, Slavery’s Story Turns Full Circle,” a conservative blog about the article characterized it with a different title: “Globe Drags Out Slavery Issue While Dragging America Through the Dirt.” Insinuating that *The Globe* was unpatriotic for publishing the article, the blog concluded that Kranish was merely “fan[ning] the flames of racial politics” and argued, “Perhaps the news section of The Boston Globe has yet to realize the legal practice of American slavery is now history itself, and other more important battles need to be fought over other than the ones that were fought over and settled over one hundred and forty years ago.”⁴ What this blogger failed to realize, however, is that it is not the history of slavery that is at the heart of contemporary issues of race in America but it is instead, the memory of slavery in the United States. While this blogger wished to remove slavery from public debate, Reverend Wright and Michael Kranish show that slavery is still at the heart of contemporary discussions of race. The fact that these two men used the memory of slavery so differently – in Wright’s case, as an unforgivable act that still structures the African American experience, and in Kranish’s case, as an example of how far the nation has progressed – is only further evidence of its continued relevance in American society. Slavery may be over but the

³ Michael Kranish, “At Capitol, Slavery’s Story Turns Full Circle: Historians Hope Significance Comes to Light as Obama Takes Office,” *The Boston Globe* 28 December 2008 [article on-line]; available from: http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2008/12/28/at_capitol_slaverys_story_turns_full_circle/; Internet; accessed 5 February 2009.

⁴ Kerry Picket, “Globe Drags Out Slavery Issue While Dragging American Through the Dirt,” *Newsbusters*, 30 December 2008 [article on-line]; available from: <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/kerry-picket/2008/12/30/globe-drags-out-slavery-issue-drags-eight-american-presidents-through->; Internet; accessed 5 February 2009.

ways in which Americans will remember slavery was certainly not “fought over and settled over one hundred and forty years ago.”

The simple truth is that there is no simple truth for how to discuss race and slavery in contemporary America. Just as the candidates, media, and average Americans struggled to find the words to discuss the topic during the 2008 election, museums have struggled to include meaningful discussions of slavery in their interpretations. This study has enumerated the many challenges that have historically confronted museums as they try to incorporate a history of slavery into their tours. The most difficult of these challenges is inherent at every site of slavery. It is the fact that the history of the enslaved, by definition, occurred alongside the history of the enslaver. Confronted with visitors with limited attention spans and full schedules, museums have prioritized the history of the white family in guided tours of the main house and have often offered only supplemental or self-guided tours of slave history. This practice has normalized the narrative of white history as American history and has relegated slavery to the museum equivalent of a sidebar in a textbook. This is not a criticism of museums as much as it is a statement on the ways in which Americans envision the country’s past. As was evidenced at each of the museums in this study, the public is simply not ready to give up the comfortable narratives of traditional American history: the uncompromised heroism of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and the founding generation, the veneration of Robert E. Lee, and the romance of the Old South. These aspects of museum interpretations have remained constant throughout the history of museums in the United States.

Despite these constants, the rise of new social history was a seminal moment in the history of museums because it forced them to examine the lesser-known actors in the nation's past. Though it is at the heart of slavery interpretation at museums, social history has not provided an illustrative example of how to create a new synthesis of American history that takes into account a more diverse group of historical actors. Instead, for example, African American history is still a separate subfield of American history with its own canon of literature. Just as the era of social history has led to numerous micro-studies of particular populations in particular moments, new museums, taking their cue from this scholarship, serve increasingly narrow interests. In recent years, for example, museums such as the Atomic Testing Museum in Las Vegas, the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, the Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Kentucky, and the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco have opened.⁵

Of course, this new trend in museums does not help existing sites that have always represented themselves as a microcosm of the larger American narrative. This study, however, has shown that museums are continuously in conversation with academic history and popular culture and thus, the question of how to integrate the history of slavery into a larger narrative of American history will not be solved by museums alone. Instead, the nation as a whole will need to acknowledge the contributions of all American populations in ways that challenge and change existing concepts of American history.

⁵ Kathryn Shattuck, "History's Real Stuff (Sorry, Miss Grundy)," *The New York Times*, 9 September 2007 [article on-line]; available from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/09/arts/design/09shattuck.html>; Internet; accessed 21 January 2009.

Many museums are continuing to play a role in this process but if their past progress and the 2008 election were any indication, this will not be an easy task.