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“History is Bunk”:

Historical Memories at Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village

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**“History is Bunk”:
Historical Memories at Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village**

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Dissertation

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Dedication

For Keith Swigger and Kathleen Swigger
my parents and my first teachers

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“History is Bunk”:

Historical Memories at Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village

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In 1929, Henry Ford opened Greenfield Village, his outdoor history museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Fourteen years earlier, Ford announced that written history was bunk. The museum was designed to reshape the historical project by celebrating farmers and inventors in lieu of military heroes and politicians. Included among the structures were Thomas Edison’s Menlo Park Laboratory, Noah Webster’s home, and Ford’s Quadricycle shop. Ford used architecture and material culture to connect American progress to self-made manhood, middle-class domesticity, and the inventive spirit. Despite signs that the struggling automotive industry is responsible for Michigan’s economic decline, the site is popular—since 1976 over one million visitors have attended each year. This project examines this phenomenon, which exemplifies how publics often fail to link past and present in the same way that scholars do. The Village’s largely unexplored archives documenting its internal history are mined, along with primary and secondary sources on the histories of public history and the Detroit metropolitan-area. Chapter one studies the site’s construction and audiences during Ford’s presidency

arguing that the populist public images of Ford and Edison mediated encounters with the Village. Chapter two links the site to the racial politics of the Detroit metro-area, which marked the Village as an alternative public space for whites. Chapter three draws on visitor surveys, to show how patrons' worldviews were shaped by the politics of populist-conservatism. Chapter four explains how the appointment of an academic as president ensured the addition of progressive historical narratives, but the site's location in Dearborn impeded efforts to draw a larger African American audience. In the mid-1990s, the fifth chapter contends, administrators successfully sought new patrons by blending progressive history and entertainment. This project argues that the Village is popular because it articulates both visitors' longing for an imagined past, and desires for alternative futures. It also proposes that representations of the past are understood not only through a study of their internal histories, but by placing them in the broader contexts of the economy, politics, and social relationships of the geographic area in which they are located.

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INTRODUCTION

History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history that we make today.¹

Henry Ford, 1916

In 1916, Henry Ford vehemently rejected the value of the past. In fact, many Americans living in the midst of a technological boom and on the cusp of the roaring twenties did the same. Three years later, however, and in direct contradiction to his by then infamous statement, Ford would embrace the historical project and set out to create his own museum. He revised his original thought, explaining that what he really meant was that written history was bunk, since it touted the accomplishments of military heroes and politicians rather than the men who had really made the country an economic powerhouse: farmers and inventors, men not unlike himself.² The result of Ford's change of heart was the establishment of the Edison Institute Museum and Greenfield Village.

The Edison Institute Museum, housed in a building whose façade replicates Independence Hall, used conventional displays to document America's technological past. In one section, rows upon rows of harrows lined the halls, and viewers could see, in painstaking and sometimes painful detail, the incremental changes in technology that culminated in contemporary industrial achievements. Before opening the Museum, however, Henry Ford welcomed guests to Greenfield Village. Ironically, the man who had participated in forever altering America's pastoral landscape and economy through

¹ As qtd. in *Chicago Tribune*, May 25, 1916.

² Geoffrey C. Upward, *A Home for Our Heritage: The Building and Growth of Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum, 1929-1979* (Dearborn, MI: The Henry Ford Museum Press, 1979), 3.

the mass production of the automobile had created an outdoor museum paying homage to the moment immediately preceding the arrival of the Model-T. Ford christened his representation of the past Greenfield Village, named after the township where he had met and courted his wife Clara. Greenfield Village was located in Dearborn, Michigan, which was also the site of the enormous Rouge Factory where Ford cars were manufactured.

When it opened in 1929, with Thomas Alva Edison and President Herbert Hoover in attendance, Greenfield Village consisted of both real and replicated buildings from the mid-to late-nineteenth century that Ford collected or commissioned to be built. A reconstruction of the Menlo Park laboratory paid homage to Thomas Edison and his inventions and set the principal theme for the site: America's success was due not to great political or military leaders, but to the hard work of inventors, engineers, and farmers. In stark contrast to the majority of early-twentieth-century historical sites, which celebrated the homes and landscapes associated with the heroes of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, Ford's outdoor museum placed the common man, science, and technology at the center of America's history. Along with Edison's Menlo Park, patrons could explore the cabin in which educational author William McGuffey was born, a five-hundred-ton stone medieval English cottage, slave quarters from a Georgia plantation, a New England Village Green, mills and shops in which hired artisans engaged in their historic crafts, and a steamboat named *Suwanee*. Ford also hired actors to dress in period costume. For Ford, history was best when it was recreated and reenacted in the present; he wanted people to be able to touch and feel the past, to experience it firsthand. In fact, Ford soon opened a school and conducted many of his experiments with soybeans at the site. Ford

was so pleased with his creation that he spent most of his free time in the Village until his death in 1947.³

What was during Ford's lifetime a small outdoor museum is today a large "History Attraction." Attendance at Greenfield Village increased rapidly after opening its doors to the public. In 1929, the site reported 400 visitors. Just four years later, the site reported a total of 1,000 visitors. During 1950, 500,000 people toured Greenfield Village, and by 1968, 1.3 million people passed through the site's gates. Since the 1970s, attendance at the Village has decreased, although collective visitation to the Village and Museum has remained high. For example, in 2000, the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village welcomed a little over 1.6 million visitors, 596,984 of which attended the Village. Still, the complex's board members and employees continue to explore new ways of increasing the site's appeal to its audiences. In 2002, Greenfield Village underwent a massive renovation and today it includes seven historic districts including a Main Street, a recreation of Ford's childhood home, the "A Taste of History Restaurant," and the opportunity to drive a Model-T.⁴

The site's longstanding popularity is particularly interesting given its location in the Detroit metro-area (see Figure A). Detroit's economy depended on the successes and failures of the auto-industry. Once a city that embodied the American Dream, today it epitomizes the demise of the American manufacturing industry. Despite Detroit's recent

³ Upward 76.

⁴ See Upward, 76 for 1933 visitor statistics, 124 for 1950 statistics and 15 for 1968 statistics. 2000 visitor statistics come from Denise Thal, "The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village Attendance: 1950-2006," e-mail to author, December 5, 2007.

Detroit Metropolitan Area, MI, USA

Henry Ford's Greenfield Village



Figure A: Map of Detroit-metro area including City of Dearborn and Greenfield Village.

designation as the poorest city in the country,⁵ many residents and tourists continue to support a site that celebrates Ford and the machine.

Curiosity about the Village was also sparked by the site's failure to draw a significant portion of the metro-area's African American population. The Village landscape has long included representations of enslavement and of a black tenant farming family. Today, those stories are interpreted in fairly progressive terms. It is clear that academic views of the past, which stress an inclusive representation that recognizes the agency of people of color has influenced the Village's representation of African American life. Yet attendance by African American families remains low.⁶ Given that the Village is one of the largest educational sites in the metro-area, and the high number of African American residents, these attendance rates are puzzling. This project also argues that the disconnect between the site and black residents is rooted not only in the Village's representation of black Americans but also its location in Dearborn, well-known as one of the most racist suburban cities in the metro-area. A discussion of Ford's reputation in the black community and the history of Dearborn clarify that the city's reputation among African Americans likely shaped interest in visiting the Village.

Although Greenfield Village is often mentioned in histories of historic preservation, history museums, and biographies of Henry Ford, scholars are more likely

⁵ James Prichards, "Census Data Shows Detroit Now Nation's Poorest City," *The Associated Press*, August 31, 2005, <http://lexis-nexis.com>.

⁶ Statistical data documenting African American visitorship has been difficult to locate, however, as late as 1991, according to the "Evaluating the Interpretive Program Presented at Hermitage Slave Houses and Mattox House: Comments from Members of the Transition Team," Accession #186, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 7, black patrons accounted for 5% of the visitors total attendees. Surveys of photographs taken at special events confirm that African Americans do not account for a significant portion of the site's visitors, which is discussed in Chapter Two.

to comment on its uniqueness.⁷ The Village's idiosyncratic landscape and representation of the past, and its association with one of the most controversial figures of the twentieth century, mark it, in the minds of many scholars, as a distinctive and atypical historic site that reflects little in the way of broader trends and issues in the representation of America's past. This project diverges from that assessment arguing that while the Village's landscape is in many ways unique, it can be used as a case study to answer a series of questions.

Research Questions

How do visitors use and encounter history? Since the late 1960s, scholars from across the disciplines have turned their attention to the study of memories, heritages, and traditions. Although they use a multitude of terms—social memories, historical memories, cultural memories, traditions, heritages—scholars are essentially referring to the uses of the past in everyday life. Those who interpret the meaning and function of

⁷ The following scholars have written most extensively and critically about Greenfield Village. Charles B. Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust 1926-1949* (Charlottesville: Published for the Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States by the University Press of Virginia, 1981). Hosmer includes a lengthy discussion of Greenfield Village's construction in his chapter entitled "Outdoor Museums," 74-132. Michael Wallace studies Greenfield Village in two essays. "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," in Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig eds., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986) and "Reflections on the History of Historic Preservation," in Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig eds., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). In both of these essays, Wallace identifies the site as emblematic of Ford's nostalgia for a union-less workforce. This project accepts Wallace's assertion, but argues that the site functions beyond Ford in varying ways. Patricia West also writes briefly about the site in *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999). Diane Barthel similarly mentions Greenfield Village in her book *Historic Preservation: Collective Memory and Historical Identity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1996). Finally, Warren Leon and Margaret Piatt place Greenfield Village in the larger context of living-history museums in "Living-History Museums," in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: a Critical Assessment*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1989), 64-97.

public displays and of the uses and consumption of the past often lean toward one of two views: many contend that representations of the past are best understood through an examination of the messages that they send, while other scholars suggest that tourists and visitors can interpret the information presented in multiple ways. In extreme cases, visitors might even understand, interact with, or interpret the information in ways that seem contradictory to the aims and goals of the historic site, museum, or monument. Consequently, even if representations of the past are intended to promote dominant or traditional views of the past, patrons may have alternate encounters. This project approaches the Village with both views in mind, examining both the messages that administrators and staff intended for the site to send, and the political, social, and economic contexts that likely influenced visitors.

The first question posed also leads to the second question that guides this project: How is it that various publics often connect the past and present in different ways than scholars do? Today, two historical perspectives compete for dominance in America's historic sites, museums, and monuments, although there are certainly areas of gray in between. One version of American history recognizes both the nations' failures and successes, and admits injustices particularly when it comes to the treatment of women, people of color, and the poor. The other version is largely celebratory, promotes American exceptionalism, depicts the nation on an interminable road of progress, and often glosses over difficult, painful, and traumatic histories. At the risk of generalizing, scholars and citizens with liberal politics often promote the former version, while (few) academics and publics with more conservative political leanings cling to the latter. The Village offers a useful case study from which to embark on an analysis of this divide

because it has been open for visitation since 1929 and because its landscape and interpretation of the past have been constructed by scholars, lay historians, and visitors.

Previous Scholarship

How Do Visitors Use and Encounter History?

Authors such as Eric Hobsbawm, David Lowenthal, and Pierre Nora have written perhaps the most cited works examining the construction and representation of the past. Each suggests that the past is primarily used to support patriotic or nostalgic views and demonstrates that the past is in perpetual dialogue with the present. For example, in his introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*,⁸ Hobsbawm explains that studies of traditions demonstrate that nations invent traditions to fortify and justify their existence and actions. Historical analysis of traditions reveals the ways in which contemporary concerns led to their creation.

David Lowenthal suggests that heritage promotes primarily nostalgic understandings of the past by pointing to the ways in which it differs from history. In *Possessed by the Past: the Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Lowenthal explains the difference between history and heritage. “History explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time,” he writes, while “heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes.”⁹ Consequently, unlike heritage, history encourages the discussion of controversial, traumatic, and painful pasts. For Lowenthal, history can

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁹ David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), xi.

serve as a sort of checks and balance system when it comes to heritage. Lowenthal glosses over the ways in which history can be used similarly to serve the needs of the present, but his identification of a recent heritage boom and of heritage's confluence of past and present seems accurate. *Possessed by the Past* expands on Lowenthal's earlier work, *The Past is a Foreign Country*¹⁰ in which he makes similar arguments.

Documenting how people have used the past on a global scale, Lowenthal claims that increasingly, the public divides the past from the present in the name of authenticity. Every effort is made to ensure that the present does not taint, interfere with, or influence, the products of the past. According to Lowenthal, however, such a goal is unrealistic. "Advocates of preservation who adjure us to save things unchanged fight a losing battle," Lowenthal writes, "since even to appreciate the past is to transform it."¹¹ He continues: "Every relic is a testament not only to its initiators but to its inheritors, not only to the spirit of the past but to the perspectives of the present."¹² The work of Hobsbawm and Lowenthal establish firmly the ways in which past and present are in a perpetual dialogue with one another.

Pierre Nora similarly studies representations of the past, but uses the term "memories" in his work to describe the ways in which places representing the past promote nostalgia. In his article "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux des Memoire*,"¹³ Nora, like Lowenthal, argues that the modern age is besieged by an interest

¹⁰ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 412.

¹² *Ibid.*, 412.

¹³ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24.

in the past; a direct consequence of the “acceleration of history.”¹⁴ The new seems to be replacing the old at a rapidly increasing rate leading many to fear that the present will be absorbed by the past and forgotten.¹⁵ Unlike the present, the past—whether it be 1850 or 1950—is often characterized as a period in which events occurred at a slower, more satisfying, pace. Nora also asserts, however, that nostalgia for the past is guided by contemporary concerns; what is idealized about the past is a direct consequence of what is perceived as missing from the present.

Richard Handler and Eric Gable’s *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*¹⁶ also supports the suggestions of scholars like Hobsbawm, Lowenthal, and Nora through a specific case study; this work also closely parallels my own in terms of subject-matter. In their anthropological study of John D. Rockefeller’s Colonial Williamsburg, Handler and Gable assess the ability of employees at Colonial Williamsburg to incorporate the New Social History into their interpretations of the past; efforts at the site primarily focused on including representations and discussions of the lives of enslaved African Americans. They follow a brief institutional history with ethnography and conclude that despite efforts to include the stories of enslaved African Americans, interpreters are so concerned with presenting an authentic view of the past that they focus on the details of everyday life rather than the multiple meanings and consequences of history, subsequently failing to communicate a complex past to their audiences.

¹⁴ Nora, 7.

¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶ Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Another study of heritage that inspired this work was Steven Hoelscher’s *Heritage on Stage: The Invention of Ethnic Place in America’s Little Switzerland*. Madison: University Press of Wisconsin, 1998.

Despite the convincing arguments of Hobsbawm, Lowenthal, Nora, and scholars like Handler and Gable, others contend that representations of the past can be encountered and used in unintentional ways. In direct response to Handler and Gable, Edward M. Bruner suggests that focusing on an historic site's relationship to the authentic actually replicates the problems that many scholars are attempting to eradicate. In "Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of Postmodernism"¹⁷ Bruner examines New Salem, a living history museum in Illinois that represents Abraham Lincoln's life during the 1830s. Bruner explains that his examination of New Salem and his assessment of its multiplicity of meanings support his assertion that:

Contemporary American tourist attractions tend to be described in ways that replicate elements of the theory of postmodernism, emphasizing the inauthentic, constructed nature of the sites, their appeal to the masses, their imitation of the past, and their efforts to present a perfected version of themselves. This is a narrow and distorted view that fails to account for the popularity and frequency of such sites on the American landscape that begs the question of the meaning of the sites to the participants, and that by its denigration of popular American culture and mass tourist sites imposes an elitist politics blind to its own assumptions.¹⁸

Bruner explains that the primary goal of studying tourist attractions should not be to assess the level of obsession with representing accurate history at the site, but to determine the range of possible interpretations and meanings audiences might gain from their encounters with these locales.

Handler and Gable respond to Bruner's claims in their essay "After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site."¹⁹ Handler and Gable explain that they are not essentialists who view Colonial Williamsburg as inauthentic, but they do view interpreters as

¹⁷ Edward M. Bruner, "Abraham Lincoln as Authentic Reproduction: A Critique of Postmodernism," *American Anthropologist* 96, no.2 (1994): 397-415.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 412.

¹⁹ Eric Gable and Richard Handler, "After Authenticity at an American Heritage Site," *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 3 (1996): 568-578.

engaging in a “universal form of cultural construction.”²⁰ Even if interpreters recognize that the past they represent is not really real, they believe that it is in these myths, “if institutions such as Colonial Williamsburg and the American nation itself are to survive and prosper, people must believe.”²¹ Colonial Williamsburg’s financial success confirms for Handler and Gable that visitors have fairly limited kinds of encounters with the site.

Other scholars have drawn conclusions similar to those of Bruner. Nuala C. Johnson, for example, suggests that the heritage landscape in Ireland has “enabled rather than constrained a complex and nuanced rendering of the Irish past.”²² In her study of Strokestown Park House, Ireland, Johnson argues that rather than presenting the past from the perspective of the ruling class, the interpretation at Strokestown provides ample opportunities for tourists to “make their own critical judgments.”²³ For example, tourists enter through the front door, are encouraged to touch objects, and she notes that the everyday lives of the people who lived in the house rather than its architecture is the focus of each tour.²⁴ Johnson argues that the interpretation at Strokestown provides tourists with the necessary tools to place themselves in the context of what is normally an exclusive history.

While this project recognizes that the messages sent at the Village often supported dominant historical narratives, it argues that visitors, too, played a central role in constructing their encounters with the Village landscape. As paying customers, what visitors did and did not enjoy about their experiences affected the administrations

²⁰ Gable, 576.

²¹ Ibid., 576.

²² Nuala C. Johnson, “Where Geography and History Meet: Heritage Tourism and the Big House in Ireland,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 86, no. 3 (1996): 551-566, 564.

²³ Ibid., 564.

²⁴ Ibid., 563.

decisions to add buildings, special events, and alter interpretive scripts. Further, as the site developed its own history within the metro-area, patrons' use of the site was associated with the economy, society, and politics of Detroit and its surrounding suburbs.

Academic and Popular Histories: The Divide

In 1996, Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Englehardt's collection of essays titled *History Wars: the Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* was published. The essays were written largely in response to the failed plans for an exhibit of the Enola Gay at the Smithsonian Institute. The exhibit met criticism for displaying varying political perspectives on the United States' decision to drop the atomic bomb. The planned Enola Gay exhibit brought to the fore the ways in which the social movements of the 1960s had resulted in not only political, but also social and cultural change. Many activists in the civil rights movement, women's movement, American Indian Movement, and gay and lesbian movement had chosen careers in higher education, and worked hard to challenge established historical narratives that were largely exclusionary. But as these efforts moved outside of higher education and into public spaces such as museums and textbooks, various publics reacted negatively. In August of 1995, shortly after the Enola Gay exhibit was canceled, then Senate Majority Leader and presidential hopeful Robert Dole articulated the anger of many Americans in a political speech to Indianapolis's American Legion. He attacked America's enemies, who included not only North Koreans and Iraqis, but also "the arbiters of political correctness... government and intellectual

elites who seem embarrassed by America,” and “liberal academic elites” who “control more than our schools.”²⁵

The sometimes real, sometimes perceived division between the common folk and academics is rooted in what James Davison Hunter called America’s “culture wars” in 1991.²⁶ Hunter drew on Antonio Gramsci’s theories of hegemony and counter-hegemony to argue that American culture was shaped by “political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding.”²⁷ According to Hunter, the culture wars had long been part of American life, but were confined to a larger “biblical culture—among numerous Protestant groups, and Catholics and Jews—over such issues as doctrine, ritual observance, and religious organization.” He continues, that “underlying their disagreements, therefore, were basic agreements about the order of life in community and nation—agreements forged by biblical symbols and imagery.” But Hunter claimed that contemporary divisions of political consequence were not theological and ecclesiastical in character, “but the result of differing worldviews.”²⁸ The phrase “culture war,” quickly became a catch-all phrase to describe a wide-range of conflicts; many insist that such a binary view of American political debates supports reductive analysis of public opinion.²⁹ But this phrase is useful in that it assists in this project’s articulation of how the past

²⁵ As qtd. in Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, “Introduction: History Under Siege,” in *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds. (Owl Books: New York, 1996), 4.

²⁶ James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: the Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁹ See, for example, Morris P. Fiorina, *Culture War?: the Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Parson Education, 2006). Numerous books and articles have studied, critiqued, and analyzed the “culture wars.” For the purposes of this work, however, discussion will focus largely on competing views of American history and will be discussed in further depth in Chapter Four.

became an important subject in political debates during the mid- and into the late-twentieth-century.

Academics have responded in varying ways to charges that their projects are laden with a liberal agenda that blinds them to the Truth. Some have attempted to understand the divide by studying what makes some memories, heritages, and traditions so appealing to the public. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen³⁰ determined American's relationship to the past by asking them directly. In a survey of 2,000 Americans they found that the public connects to the past in highly personal ways and are more likely to respond to representations that appeal to individual experiences and knowledge. A key point of the book for this project is Rosenzweig's and Thelen's finding that museums are one of the most trusted sources of the past.

This project asks and attempts to answer similar questions to those asked by Rosenzweig and Thelen. The Village proves a particularly useful site for this kind of inquiry because of the way its interpretive landscape has been altered in response to changes in the academy. During the 1980s, administrators appointed an academic president—Harold K. Skramstad—who subsequently spearheaded a revision of the site's interpretive scripts to reflect shifting paradigms in higher education. The history of both the Village and the visitor experience both before this moment and after offers a useful lens through which to examine the limits and possibilities of adding scholarship to public history sites.

³⁰ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, eds., *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Nostalgia, Populism, and the Cultural Landscape of the Village

While the Village landscape has remained relatively static since Ford's death in 1947, the interpretation of that landscape has been altered in response to shifts in the administration, the metro-area economy, and higher education. Visitors have responded well to multiple changes to the Village's interpretive plan; attendance rates have remained high. As a consequence of these conceptual transformations coupled with high attendance rates, the site provides the opportunity for fruitful inquiry about how patrons use representations of the past and how this use changes over time. A better understanding of how Greenfield Village maintained and increased in popularity during the post-war urban crisis is gained by drawing on Svetlana Boym's complex definition of nostalgia.

In her study of nostalgia and post-communist cities Boym asserts that:

Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future...Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.³¹

Boym's understanding of nostalgia best explains the continuing popularity of the Village, which venerates Ford, in spite of dramatic declines in the nation's auto-industry. Visitor encounters with the site have included not only a longing for the past, but also for unrealized futures.

³¹ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xvi. Although Boym offers a rich map of nostalgia that includes definitions for the multiplicity of nostalgias, this study draws only on her assertion that nostalgia is an impulse that is linked to desires about both the past and the future. Other recent discussions of nostalgia include Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Making Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995); and Linda Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia and the Post-modern," paper presented at MLA conference, San Francisco, December 1997.

At a private museum, even one stamped by the presence of someone as powerful as Henry Ford, visitors play a significant role in constructing the messages that it sends; most obviously because the museum relies on visitors for a large portion of its funding. At the Village, the past became, for many white visitors, a tool for reinforcing their political perspectives in the present. In explaining why they choose to study Henry Ford, many biographers point to his contradictory worldview and note that it actually mirrored that of many Americans in the early twentieth-century. A populist, anti-Semite, pacifist, isolationist, and bigot, he is not enigmatic, but in fact representative of many white farmers and small town businessmen that played an important role in shaping twentieth-century American culture. Biography, then, is critical in this study. Because the visitor can compare her own life to that depicted, the individual's biography then becomes part of the national biography. This project is in many ways an analysis of the politics of that process, and leads to a discussion of the important role that populism plays in the nostalgias present at the Village.

For the purposes of this project, the term populism is used to refer not to the agrarian Populist revolt of the 1890s, but a broader, populist spirit. Stephen Watts explains Ford's populism as drawing upon several sources:

the residue of republicanism, with its tradition of civic obligation; the Protestant work ethic, with its insistence on the moral value of labor; and the values of market 'producerism,' which claimed that the ownership of property and the production of useful goods bestowed social dignity and economic independence on the citizen. Deeply suspicious of the machinery of high finance, this populist culture, in the elegant words of Richard Hofstadter, attempted "to hold on to some of the values of agrarian life, to save personal entrepreneurship and individual opportunity and the character type they engendered... [It promoted] the ideal of a life lived close to nature and the soil, the esteem for the primary contacts of

country and village life, the cherished image of the independent and self-reliant man.”³²

The populist spirit of Ford continues to dominate the Village landscape, and many visitors pay to consume just such messages of hard work, determination, and a utopic vision of small town life. The brand of populism present at the Village is also laden with nostalgia. But in this case, it is a nostalgia that longs for an alternative future, one in which visitors, too, were Fords or Edisons or Firestones; one in which visitors were able to either participate in the maintenance of a pastoral landscape or escape the aspects of city life—or even suburban life—that they disliked.

The populist dream, however, was not inevitably utopian. Also contemplated in this project is the way in which Ford’s brand of populism could be interpreted as a nightmare by African Americans. Certainly, many black Americans could have enjoyed the site’s inclusion of slave cabins, the George Washington Carver memorial, and the Mattox farmhouse; in the 1930s, there were few representations of African American life at history museums. Still, for black visitors, the idyllic pastoral landscape may have been read quite differently. Fewer black Americans opened and sustained small businesses. In

³² Steven Watts, *The People’s Tycoon: Henry Ford and the American Century* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2005), 62. Although this project draws on Watts’ definition of populism, it also recognizes the vast literature on the subject of populism. Richard Hofstadter’s *The Age of Reform: from Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955) is often cited as one of the most important works on this topic; it has also been heavily critiqued. Many argue that he simplified the movement and its participants. For a review of the historiography of Populism since Hofstadter see Alan Brinkley’s “Richard Hofstadter’s *The Age of Reform: a Reconsideration*,” *Reviews in American History* 13 (1985): 462-480. Today, many scholars look to Michael Kazin’s *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995) when studying populism beyond the mass movement that arose in the 1880s among farmers in the South and great Plains and then “crashed during the crisis of the 1890s,” 5. Kazin argues that populism is a “language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter,” 1. This project recognizes the limits of Hofstadter’s work, which Watts cites, but draws primarily on the definitions employed by Watts, rather than Kazin and others because of the Village’s inextricable links to Ford’s worldview and because it best articulates how populism is identified with small town landscapes.

small towns, many African Americans had little to no political recourse in light of racist public policies. After all, at the Village, black Americans are depicted as slaves and impoverished tenant farmers. Even George Washington Carver's memorial is a recreation of his slave cabin. These alternative views of the Village's nostalgic portrayal of the past are also considered.

Other nostalgias abound at the Village. When Ford built the Village, he included buildings and objects not from a distant past, but from the contemporary landscape. When visitors encountered the Village, they interacted not with a colonial town, in which the past was a "foreign country," but with a familiar landscape and objects. Many of the buildings came from Detroit and others reminded patrons of their hometown Main Streets. Patrons could use the site to explore their personal pasts and define them as history. Even as turn-of-the-century buildings became more a part of the historic rather than the contemporary landscape, patrons developed a history with the Village, and their encounters with the site were subsequently laden with yet another layer of nostalgia. In identifying how visitors may use the site not only to fulfill a longing for an imagined past, but also their personal pasts, their previous experiences at the Village, or unfulfilled dreams and desires, a more complex view of the visitor experience and the popularization of history is gained.

Greenfield Village is examined in this work both as and as part of a cultural landscape. In *The Power of Place* Dolores Hayden writes that the history of the cultural landscape lies at the intersection of, "the production of space," and the "human patterns impressed upon the contours of the natural environment." It is, she continues, "the story of how places are planned, designed, built, inhabited, appropriated, celebrated, despoiled,

and discarded.”³³ Drawing on the work of cultural geographers such as Henri LeFebvre, Yi-Fu Tuan, and John Brinckerhoff Jackson, Hayden sketches a framework for considering urban landscapes that “combines an approach to aesthetics,” with “an approach to politics.” Both, she asserts, apply to the history of urban landscapes.³⁴ This project uses a similar framework, tracing how the cultural landscape of the Village was produced not only by Ford and his architects, but also the worldview of patrons, race relations, and economic shifts in the metro-area.

Also influencing this analysis of the Village and the visitor experience is contemporary urban history scholarship. In their collection of essays, *The New Suburban History*, editors Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue write that they and their fellow authors “do not confine their studies to isolated suburban enclaves.” “Instead” they continue, “they take a broader metropolitan perspective, paying attention to the place of suburbs in political and economic relationship with central cities, competing suburbs, and their regions as a whole.”³⁵ This project uses a similar approach by considering how the Village operated not as a distinct landscape, but as a public space within the metro-area. It also considers how Dearborn interacted with Detroit. An analysis of local history demonstrates that the visitor experience at the Village reflects broader shifts on the landscape, particularly as whites abandoned downtown residences in favor of the suburbs and communities surrounding downtown area developed racist reputations.

³³ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵ Kevin M. Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue eds., *The New Suburban Histories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 6.

Sources

The visitor experience is of course difficult to ascertain. One cannot call every visitor to the Village since 1929 and administer a survey. There are, however, opportunities to contemplate how patrons used the site between 1929 and 2004 through an interdisciplinary approach. This project subsequently draws on archival sources, secondary materials, and contemporary interviews with patrons and presenters. The Benson Ford Research Center houses interpretive manuals and tour guide scripts, but it also includes journals documenting guide's encounters with patrons, and after Ford's death, marketing materials that include surveys of visitors. Between 1969 and 1980, the Museum and Village administered surveys fairly consistently and this information is particularly useful in understanding what patrons did and did not enjoy about their experience at the site. In the last chapter, interviews with presenters and visitors offer a contemporary glimpse of the site's representation of the past and the visitor experience.

Along with archival materials, this project draws on newspaper coverage of the site from the *Detroit Free Press*, the city's black newspaper *The Michigan Chronicle*, and *The New York Times*. Secondary materials drawing from public history, urban studies, popular culture, and gender studies provide further information concerning the history of Ford, the history of representations of the past in the United States, and the Detroit metro-area. Through both primary and secondary sources, this project builds a contextual framework for understanding the social, cultural, and economic milieu in which visitors to the Village operated during various periods of its history as a means of demonstrating how the Village visitor experience both changed and remained consistent between 1929 and 2004.

A Note on Terminology

Ford's museum complex has been referred to by a variety of names that have changed over time. Between 1929 and 1951 the site was known as the Edison Institute Museum and Greenfield Village. In 1952, the name first appeared as The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village; this title remained until 1973, when the order of names was switched to Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum because it was thought that Greenfield Village had more name recognition. In 1981 the names were changed back to the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. Then, in 2002, the site was renamed the Henry Ford: America's Greatest History Attraction. This project will use the terms Greenfield Village and Village and the Henry Ford Museum and Museum interchangeably.³⁶

Chapter Outline

Each chapter covers a specific period in the site's history. Chapter One: The Fording of American History: Contextualizing Greenfield Village (1929-1947) first places the site in the broader scope of representations of the past in the early twentieth century. It also argues that Ford's anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and views on labor, are echoed in his collection of Americana. A consideration of the public images of Henry Ford and Thomas Edison demonstrate the ways in which these two men were connected to populist cultural values that were also manifest on the Village landscape. Patrons attending the Village during the Great Depression may have read the site in multitudinous

³⁶ "Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village Corporate Name and Logo Chronology," Vertical File, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford and Frank Provenzano, "New Name to Retool Image of Ford Museum and Village," *The Detroit Free Press*, January 28, 2003, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

ways. The Village may have proposed a utopic economic alternative to industrialization, or to the industrialized city plagued by ethnic, racial, social, and economic conflict, particularly after the Detroit race riot of 1943. Or, the Village may have offered an ethnically diverse labor force with a representation of the past to which working and middle-class Americans could link their personal and family histories.

Chapter Two: *The Village, the Suburb, and the City: Greenfield Village and the Post-War Urban Crisis (1948-1967)* begins after Ford's death and the end of his presidency. Between 1948 and 1967, the year of the riots, new positions were created and a strong administration and organizational structure absent during Ford's presidency emerged. This chapter shifts attention to the visitor's role in shaping the purpose and function of the past. It also examines the ways in which representations of the past are intimately tied to local landscapes. As a study of Dearborn and Detroit demonstrates, white visitors used the Village as an alternative public space during some of Detroit's most tumultuous years. The Village's location in Dearborn, run by Orville Hubbard's openly racist political machine, places it firmly in the landscape of white flight.

Chapter Three: *Backlashes: The Visitor and the Village in Dialogue (1968-1979)* asks why, despite clear signs that the automotive industry—and the Ford Motor Company in particular—was a primary cause of Detroit's abysmal economy the site remained popular throughout the 1970s. The Village's high attendance rates are best understood in the context of populist conservatism. Visitor surveys conducted between 1969 and 1980 offer key insights into how and why patrons use history in their everyday lives.

Chapter Four: *The New History at Ford's Museum (1980-1995)* investigates how Village staff responded to shifts in the academy during the 1980s. New interpretive

programs focusing on the lives of African Americans were added to the site and efforts to represent the past in more historically accurate ways were made. Many patrons were reluctant to accept these shifts because they conflicted with their personal memories of and traditions associated with the site. In general, however, most patrons embraced these alterations because New History and the values of populism were often complementary.

Chapter Five: From History Museum to History Attraction (1996-2006) provides a discussion of how administrators reinvented the site as a “History Attraction,” in 2002. This chapter examines further the limits of progressive interpretive techniques when representations of the past are simultaneously inclusive and commercial. Interviews with presenters and patrons illuminate the contemporary visitor experience and further explicate the multiple nostalgias that permeate the visitor experience.

When Henry Ford built the Village, he did not know that it would become a popular historic site and later, a “History Attraction.” But Ford had a knack for identifying what people would enjoy and purchase. With high attendance rates and meticulous record keeping by administrators and staff, the Village offers a unique opportunity for the investigation of what visitors find pleasurable about the past. The Village’s location in the Detroit metro-area also makes it a fruitful site for cultural inquiry. The city and surrounding suburbs have been contoured in extreme ways by changes in economy, politics, and race relations that have affected the nation at large. Greenfield Village’s location extends the boundaries of this project beyond a specific case study. By considering how encounters at the Village have been shaped by its

depiction of the past, as well as by the broader urban and suburban cultural landscape, this dissertation hopes to contribute to discussions concerning the divide between the academy and various publics and to open the door to new and perhaps better methods of inserting scholarly knowledge into public histories. Much can be learned about how, why, and for whom history is made in America from a site constructed by a man who believed that “History is bunk.”

CHAPTER ONE

The Fording of American History: Contextualizing Greenfield Village (1929-1947)

We're going to start something. I'm going to start up a museum and give people a true picture of the development of the country. That's the only history that is worth observing, that you can preserve in itself. We're going to build a museum that's going to show industrial history, and it won't be bunk! We'll show the people what actually existed in years gone by and we'll show the actual development of American history from the early days, from the earliest days that we can recollect up to the present day.³⁷

Henry Ford, 1919

After stating that “History is more or less bunk,” in 1916, Henry Ford announced his decision to construct a museum that celebrated what he claimed was the American past that really mattered. In contrast to written, “bunk,” histories that focused on the accomplishments of military leaders and politicians, Ford’s museum would represent inventors and farmers, the common people who had made America an economic success (see Figure 1.1). The Village landscape, one might argue, reflects the architecture of Ford’s mind. The site’s buildings and their reconstructed or preserved interiors were emblematic of his anti-intellectualism in its veneration of material objects rather than texts to communicate ideas about the past. Ford also refused to limit his museum by time period or place, rather, he let his personal interests and the “earliest days that” he could “recollect,” guide the construction of the site. Ford believed that “real” history should celebrate men that he admired such as Thomas Edison, Noah Webster, and George Washington Carver, for example. Like Ford, these men embodied the ideals of self-made manhood made popular at the turn of the century. And, the site implicitly reflected Ford’s

³⁷ As qtd. in Upward, 3.



Figure 1.1: Greenfield Village Main Street 1935. The landscape here is indicative of the way in which America's small town heroes are celebrated. On the right is the general store and in the background, a turn-of-the century town hall. Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

xenophobia and anti-Semitism. Absent from its landscape are representations of the Eastern Europeans who participated in making possible the tremendous success of the Ford Motor Company

But Ford's outdoor museum was not as anomalous as it might first appear. When placed in a transnational context, Ford's representational techniques mirrored the already popular World's Fair period rooms, historic homes, and outdoor architectural museums that were by then booming in Europe. Designers of these representations were often political progressives and populists, openly using buildings and domestic interiors to maintain established racial, ethnic, and class hierarchies.

What accounts, though for the Village's popularity; why did visitors flock to see Ford's "real" history? When Henry Ford announced his Five Dollar Day, he was hailed as a progressive and a man of the people. But by 1937, he was a well-known racist, anti-Semite, isolationist, and anti-unionist. In the midst of challenges to Ford's public image, however, his history of the United States gained increasing attention. When it opened to the general public in 1934, a reported 200,000 visitors came.³⁸ By 1940, there were over 600,000.³⁹

This chapter not only considers in depth Ford's use of the past, but also contextualizes Greenfield Village in the broader history of representations of the past in the United States. It also explores the variety of meanings that the site may have conveyed while Ford served as of Greenfield Village (1929-1947). Obviously, visitors encountered the site in multitudinous ways, depending on their personal histories,

³⁸ "Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village: Calendar Year Attendance Totals 1929-1954," Box 1, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

³⁹ Ibid.

interests, assumptions, desires, and expectations. One cannot know with certainty how visitors encountered the Village during Ford's presidency. But, visitor experiences and encounters can be proposed through a consideration of popular history making in the early twentieth century, the construction of the Village, Ford's worldview, and the ways in which nostalgia can function not only as a longing for the past, but as a desire for unrealized futures. On the whole, this chapter argues for a broader interpretation of the messages that the Village sends; contradictory messages about class, race, and ethnicity pervaded the Village landscape, ensuring that visitors would encounter it in various ways.

Representing the American Past

Scholars have reluctantly located Greenfield Village in broader histories of historic preservation, historic house museums, and history museums.⁴⁰ In impetus and architectural form, Henry Ford's Village seems most like the efforts of other early-twentieth-century industrialists. John D. Rockefeller's Colonial Williamsburg, Albert Wells' Sturbridge Village, and Steven Clark's Farmer's Museum are a few of the most well-known outdoor history museums also built at or around the same time that Ford began constructing his depiction of the past. Scholars such as Diane Barthel suggest that as part of the *nouveau riche*, these American millionaires "felt the subjective need to create" staged symbolic utopias "that would complement their new 'lord of the manor

⁴⁰ One exception is Steven Conn, who argues that Ford's Edison Institute and Greenfield Village marked the last of museums organized and built with the framework of an object-based epistemology in mind, an argument he makes in his chapter "Objects and American History: the Museums of Henry Mercer and Henry Ford" in *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). I agree with Conn, but claim that the Village draws on other popular historical display techniques well established by the 1920s.

status.”⁴¹ Scholars have largely dismissed these sites as indulgences and follies of wealthy white men seeking to solidify their historical legacies. While Ford likely sought a place for himself in the American past, the Village was markedly different in form from other outdoor museums built in the 1920s and 1930s.

Like Rockefeller, Wells, and Stephen Clark Ford also constructed an outdoor American history museum paying homage to pre-industrial society. The similarities between Ford’s Village and the other sites mentioned, however, end there. Unlike Rockefeller, Ford did not rely on professional architects and historians to guide his efforts, but on his personal memories and interests. And, in opposition to Colonial Williamsburg’s recreation of a *specific* colonial town, Sturbridge Village’s focus on an unnamed pre-industrial Massachusetts township, and Clark’s devotion to celebrating the achievements of a precise agrarian community, Greenfield Village is not a representation of a specific time and place, but a collection of buildings that presents its audiences with a celebration of a particular “way of life.” Ignoring time and place, Ford chose to relocate or recreate buildings that he defined as historical. Edison’s Menlo Park laboratory, Noah Webster’s home, and William McGuffey’s birthplace, each of which appeared on the Village landscape at its opening to the general public in 1934, are emblematic of Ford’s vision. As Wallace and historian Charles B. Hosmer note, Ford sought to recreate the sometimes mythic, and in his case actualized, version of the American Dream. The Village landscape used buildings and narratives to argue that through hard work and

⁴¹ Barthel, 39.

creativity the willing can achieve financial success, while simultaneously improving the material lives of their fellow citizens.⁴²

The museum's architectural form, which mixes time periods and geographic locations, seems, upon initial inspection, anomalous and thus cursory in the context of the broader cultural history of representations of the past in the United States. Nevertheless and despite its many unique qualities, the Village derived from the collision of America's developing popular culture *and* art and science museums in the United States. The Village's use of architecture to represent the past, its recreations of home and business interiors, and most importantly, its implied privilege of Anglo-Saxons over other races and ethnicities, place it firmly in the history of representations of the past in the United States. By grounding the site's representation of the past in these broader histories, a more critical examination of the Village's cultural and historical function emerges. An intellectual history of the development of representations of the past through the intersection of these various forms, then, begins a conversation about Greenfield Village, and takes Ford's representation out of his mind and into a broader cultural, social, and economic milieu.

Museums and American History: The Divide

When Charles Willson Peale opened what is widely considered the first museum of any significance in the United States in 1786, he did so because of personal interest, not professional training. Peale had made a living and built his reputation as a portrait

⁴² See Hosmer, 74-132.

artist, eventually earning the title “Artist of the American Revolution,” but later in life, Peale became fascinated with not only painting, but also collecting the natural world. He amassed and preserved the carcasses and skeletons of birds, cows, and fish. For Peale, collecting, classifying, and displaying would lead to higher knowledge about the nature of the universe.⁴³ Steven Conn argues that Peale’s worldview was part of a broad based belief in an object-based epistemology, one which guided the efforts of other Americans engaged in museum making.⁴⁴

Peale’s broad and benevolent vision for his collection—his hope that it would provide the public with “rational amusement”⁴⁵—was unusual at the turn of the century. Peale presented audiences not only with his portraits of the founding fathers and preserved American birds, but also with a cow of five legs, six feet, and two tails. His goals were two-fold: to attract paying visitors and to educate the public. After Peale’s retirement in 1811, his sons neglected their father’s educational goals, focusing instead on obtaining entertaining curiosities with the primary objective of improving their financial status.⁴⁶ Exhibits turned more jarring and grotesque as tattooed human heads, and monkeys dressed as blacksmiths, coopers, and shoemakers were added to the museum. Still, Peale’s family could not make ends meet, and in 1821 it was incorporated as a joint-stock company. Peale died in 1827, and with the visionary out of the picture, stockholders used live-animal shows, Siamese Twins, the “Virginia Dwarfs,” and the

⁴³ Gary Kulik, “Designing the Past: History-Museum Exhibitions from Peale to the Present,” Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds. *History Museums in the United States: a Critical Assessment* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 4.

⁴⁴ Conn, 35.

⁴⁵ Kulik, 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

“Automaton Musical Lady,” to raise money.⁴⁷ By this time, educational goals were abandoned entirely for the sake of commerce. This transition from museum to carnival was completed when, in 1850, P.T. Barnum and Moses Kimball purchased Peale’s collection.

Gary Kulik notes that during the early nineteenth century, Peale’s vision of a museum as a force for public entertainment *and* education was remarkable.⁴⁸ Most academics and scholars were reluctant and, at the extreme, opposed to sharing their work with the masses. Further, Kulik contends, the first American historical societies such as the Massachusetts Historical Society (1791), the New York Historical Society (1804), and the American Antiquarian Society (1812) viewed the material world as irrelevant to the educational enterprise. Historians drew on the writings of politicians and the plans and documents of the military to develop their arguments about the past. Constitutions, bills of law, and other written documents representing the affairs of the state formed the base of historical knowledge. Material objects were recognized as sources, but these were sources for science and natural history to use.

Even the emergence of an historical profession in the United States in 1884 with the first meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA) failed to link museums and the academy. For example, Kulik notes that despite a formal alliance between the Smithsonian Institution, which was developing a history hall, and the AHA, neither academics nor museum professionals saw their interests as congruent; the Smithsonian would not hire a Ph.D. until after World War II.⁴⁹ This indifference was, in fact, mutual.

⁴⁷ Kulik, 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 10.

If historians found the collection and display of material objects interesting, they did not find such activity useful to their intellectual inquiries.

Historians' interest in material culture would intensify however, as scholars shifted their interests. As early as 1912, James Harvey Robinson's *New History* argued that history should be useful to the present.⁵⁰ Rejecting the approach that historians were like scientists, Robinson suggested that New Historians recognized the clear connection between past and present worldviews. Carl Becker, a student of Robinson and Frederick Jackson Turner, drew on the ideas of these two men to challenge the scientific view of history throughout the 1920s. His ideas would culminate in his 1931 "Everyman His Own Historian" address to the AHA, which suggested a new kind of historical inquiry recognizing the highly subjective and relativistic role that the historian played.⁵¹ Becker's address opened the door not only for historians, but for all humanities professors by broadening definitions of evidence and of "who counts." As historians' interest in everyday life grew, they would find that the sources they now needed were preserved in museums, historic houses, and the homes of antiquers. Indeed, many Americans had retained the material culture that documented their family experiences long before Becker announced the relevance of everyday life to the historical profession.

Museums were quicker to identify American material culture as significant. In 1924 the Metropolitan Museum of Art opened its American Wing. Just four years before the Village opened its doors, the American Wing recognized Colonial Era furniture as "art." Categorizing America's furniture as art marked an even greater achievement,

⁵⁰ James Harvey Robinson, *The New History* (New York: Macmillan, 1912).

⁵¹ Carl Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian," *The American Historical Association* 37, no. 2 (1932): 231-236.

because it elevated American material objects, putting them on the same cultural playing field as European furniture. The 1920s marked an explosion in American cultural productions with the rise of jazz as the first uniquely American musical form, the popularization of distinctly American literature, and the explosion of Broadway musicals performed on New York City's Great White Way. The American Wing was part of America's coming into its cultural own. But this display of American domestic arts as "high" culture drew on representation techniques that had long appeared in more middlebrow arena. The American Wing displays looked much like the period rooms at the World's Fairs.

American History at the World's Fair: Period Rooms

In 1851 the first World's Fair opened in London's famous Crystal Palace to the amazement of its audience.⁵² For the first time, the general public, most of whom would never have the financial ability to move outside of their native countries for the purpose of leisure, could experience an artificial version of international travel. The fairs were opportunities for participating nations to represent their cultural heritage and the strength of their economies using various interpretive methods such as agriculture, food, and clothing. The World's Fairs celebrated the benefits of international trade, and signified the beginnings of our contemporary global economy. The Fairs also, however, provided participants with the opportunity to experiment and play with visual display. By the time

⁵² Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Exhibitions 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 127. Rydell focuses on later fairs, but does mention the importance of the 1851 exhibition.

Ford began constructing the Village, World's Fairs and International Exhibitions were commonplace. Consequently, the similarities linking the Village's depiction of the past through architecture and the interiors of homes, business, and laboratories to representations of the American past at various International Expositions cannot be overlooked. The representation of Americana at World's Fairs is, if not explicitly, at least implicitly linked to the architectural form and cultural function of Greenfield Village.

The Paris International Exposition of 1867 first used architecture, in the form of foreign pavilions to represent national life.⁵³ Outside of the main exhibition palace, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Russia, Austria, and the United States, among others, reconstructed buildings emblematic of everyday life in their respective countries. Artur Hazelius was one of those in attendance to display the material culture of Sweden. In 1872 Hazelius, a Stockholm philologist went on holiday to the Swedish province of Dalecarlia.⁵⁴ Expecting to find a quiet, pastoral landscape, Hazelius instead encountered a community in the full throws of industrialization; the peasant culture he cherished was slowly but surely disappearing. Hazelius began to collect the costumes and implements that he felt characterized the formerly agrarian culture and society of Dalecarlia and, ultimately, Sweden.⁵⁵ In 1876, sponsored by the government, he took his collection overseas and displayed it at the Philadelphia Exhibition.⁵⁶

The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition was an enormous success in terms of touting the economic and industrial achievements of the United States. At the end of

⁵³ Edward N. Kaufman, "The Architectural Museum: From World's Fair to Restoration Village," Bettina Messias Carbonell, ed. *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 278.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 278.

Reconstruction, America was booming. Although recent immigrants, blacks, and many southerners often failed to benefit from the nation's financial success, in the eyes of the international community, America had established itself as a unified and economically powerful nation. On May 10, 1876, the exhibition opened on a 285-acre tract of Fairmount Park. Designed primarily by 27-year-old German immigrant Hermann J. Schwarzmann, the grounds overlooked the Schuylkill River. Thirty-seven nations filled over 250 pavilions, and nearly 9 million visitors flocked to Philadelphia, an impressive attendance rate given that in 1876 the population of the United States was 46 million.⁵⁷

The Centennial depicted America, for the first time, not as an agrarian society, but as an industrial one. The official name of the exhibition: "The International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures and Products of the Soil and Mine" embodied this new identity. But while the Centennial celebrated America's new industrial power, many established Anglo-Saxon Americans were anxious. These fears account for, at least in part, the representation of the past at the Exposition. Although American exhibits focused heavily on the nation's technological and industrial progress, this was also the first time for the country to tout its architectural achievements and to link colonial home décor to the nation's success.

The display constructed by the U.S. Sanitary Commission—a group formed during the Civil War and run predominantly by women—emphasized interior design, the home, and colonial furniture. In 1863, the Commission had begun to hold Sanitary Fairs, which presented the public with inspiring recreations of "colonial kitchens," "relic rooms," and "curiosity shops," designed to inspire patriotism and encourage citizens

⁵⁷ Kaufman, 278.

either donate money or to participate in the Union's cause. The fairs were a resounding success, leading organizers to conclude that permanent museums of American history would benefit the body politic. By 1876, the Commission's rooms had grown in size and scope. Alongside Hazelius' collection of costumes, the Commission presented viewers with recreations of entire colonial "homesteads," and a "New England Log-House."⁵⁸

Perhaps it was the Sanitation Commission's architectural display that inspired Hazelius to conceive of a broader and more permanent home for his costumes. Four years later, Hazelius' collections became the national property of Sweden, which they housed and displayed in the Nordiska Museum.⁵⁹ Hazelius's plans for his collection, however, were far different. What made the costumes meaningful, according to Hazelius, was their centrality to and representation of a way of life which was quickly disappearing. To preserve that way of life, Hazelius thought, one needed to recreate it on and return it to the landscape. In 1891, Hazelius opened what is well recognized today as the first outdoor architectural museum. Comprised of seventy-five acres in Stockholm, Hazelius populated the landscape with village buildings and had guides dressed in period costume perform traditional arts and crafts. By 1928 it was estimated that approximately one hundred fifty such outdoor museums existed in Sweden alone. The format of the outdoor museum would find its way onto the American landscape as well when John D. Rockefeller, Albert Wells, and Henry Ford began to construct their museums.⁶⁰

Many middle-class whites shared Hazelius' concern with the disappearance of a pastoral past. Democracy, capitalism, and immigration were dramatically altering

⁵⁸ West, 40-42.

⁵⁹ Kaufman, 279.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 279.

longstanding race, class and gender hierarchies. The American middle-class expressed their unease with these tensions through, at least in part, a growing interest in preserving the past. Patricia West links the rise in preservation and restoration of historic houses, begun in the ante-bellum period, to the anxieties produced by the industrial revolution's challenge to established gender roles, class divisions, and racial and ethnic hierarchies. The first historic houses appeared on the American landscape prior to the Civil War, but the movement flowered after Reconstruction, somewhat contemporaneously with World's Fair period rooms. These two forms of historical representation, as the next section demonstrates, seem to have been in dialogue both in architecture and in function. A discussion of the historic house movement establishes patterns that would later shape Ford's construction of the Village and the ways in which various audiences encountered it.⁶¹

Historic House Museums and Xenophobia: The Politics of the Past

In 1853 Ann Pamela Cunningham wrote her "Appeal to the Ladies of the South." Just two years after the first World's Fair, Cunningham worked to preserve what would become one of America's oldest historic house museums: Mount Vernon. Fearing that Northerners would purchase George Washington's home and restore it to pay homage to the corrupt cultural values of industrialism, Cunningham beseeched fellow southern women to donate money for the purchase of Washington's dilapidated plantation. Cunningham was an expert at raising money. When Northern women expressed interest

⁶¹ West, 42.

in her cause, she shifted her argument again. The Southern Matron abandoned her claims that Northerners were an unpatriotic group, sullied by the innate sinfulness that industrial economies bred. To raise money, she hired noted orator Edward Everett who suggested in his speech, titled “The Character of George Washington,” that Mount Vernon, and the spirit of Washington, a rational politician, might serve as a common ground for northerners and southerners to discuss slavery. Cunningham later founded the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA), a volunteer group to organize the preservation and maintenance of Washington’s home. The MVLA served as a blueprint for other women interested in the preservation of historic homes. West argues that the MVLA established that private houses devoted to the veneration of America’s founding fathers could be transmuted into “democratically accessible exemplars of domesticity, which offered cultural solutions to public, political problems.”⁶²

After the Civil War, the historic house movement boomed. The centennial raised new interest in the homes of the founding fathers. However, the industrial revolution and massive immigration from Eastern Europe also shifted the movement’s goals. West explains that, while the movement’s goals were dedicated to presenting house museums as shrines during the ante-bellum period, by the early 1900s, they were also representations of “model homes.” The centennial and the industrial revolution were accompanied by an increase in the mass production of home fashions, a subsequent renewed interest in furniture of the colonial period, and a rise in antiquing. House museums became the perfect setting for explaining America’s historical roots, while simultaneously presenting the public with decorating ideas. With this added element of

⁶² West, 36.

interest, the historic house movement became part of a widespread fascination with the American past. By the 1890s, at least two house museums were established each year. Interest in period furnishings would continue to increase as the nation entered the early twentieth century.⁶³

These somewhat idealistic views of American life grew out of anxieties fueled by massive immigration from Eastern Europe. The cultural and social customs of Eastern European immigrants became a primary concern for political progressives and the Anglo-Saxon middle-class. Progressivism appealed to Americans from across the political spectrum, but found significant support among middle-class men and women who were both drawn to the efficiency and systematic approach that technology and science proffered and fearful of the cultural disruptions that accompanied it. Social progressives sought to improve the living conditions forced upon immigrants living in tenant housing, which increasingly dominated the landscape. Domestic interiors, then, became one tool that supported the progressive agenda and historic house museums were ideal sites for such depictions. Henry Ford would be similarly influenced by this worldview as evidenced by the activities of his Sociological Department, and his earliest preservation effort, the Wayside Inn. And Greenfield Village, Ford's most ambitious historical project, whose landscape is void of ethnic diversity, not only sends messages about class, but also communicates ideas about race and ethnicity.

⁶³ West, 43.

Looking Backward with Henry Ford

October 21, 1929, 10:00 a.m., eight days before Black Tuesday, the forecast in Dearborn, Michigan portended the coming economic disaster with rain. Ford's depiction of America's economic progress as an inevitability would soon face its greatest challenge with the onset of the Great Depression. But until then, neither impending economic struggle, nor rain impeded the arrival of a 1860s Sam Hill wood-burning locomotive, which made its way to the recently constructed Smith Creek Station platform, the entrance to Henry Ford's Greenfield Village. On board the two passenger cars were President Herbert Hoover and Thomas Edison. When the train arrived and the two venerable men descended, their wives, and Henry and Clara Ford were among the twentieth-century celebrities, including Madame Curie, Will Rogers, John D. Rockefeller Jr., and Orville Wright, who greeted them. It was the "Light's Golden-Jubilee," the fiftieth anniversary of Edison's invention of the electric light and the opening day of Ford's outdoor history museum.⁶⁴

Throughout the day, Ford's guests toured the real and replicated buildings that Ford had collected or commissioned to be built. Included among the twenty-eight buildings were the Scotch Settlement School, which Ford had attended as a young man with Edsel Ruddimen; the Logan County Court House where Abraham Lincoln had made arguments during his tenure as an Illinois lawyer, a machine shop, a glass house, a blacksmith shop, and, the site's main feature, a recreation of Edison's Menlo Park laboratory. Ford even reconstructed Sally Jordan's Boarding House, where Edison's

⁶⁴ Wyn Wacchorst, *Thomas Alva Edison: An American Myth* (Cambridge, MA: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1981), 167.

engineers slept and took their meals. After a day of touring, the guests attended a dedication banquet at what would become Ford's more traditional museum adjacent to the Village: "The Edison Institute of Technology." The building's exterior was, in typical Ford fashion, a reproduction of Independence Hall. Afterwards, Ford and Edison left and returned to Menlo Park, where Edison reenacted the successful lighting of the incandescent light, which was broadcast by NBC Radio.⁶⁵

The Village's popularity grew rapidly after opening in 1929. From 400 people a day in the first year of operation site attendance rose to approximately 1,000 a day by 1933. These visitors were comprised of people who had requested to view the site, or they were Henry Ford's friends, business partners, or foreign dignitaries. In May of that year, a visitors' gatehouse was completed and on June 22, 1933, the public was admitted; adults paid 25 cents, children paid 10 cents, and school groups attended for free.⁶⁶

The crowds surprised Ford and his staff; they were unprepared as an institution to handle the needs of visitors which included tour guides, public restrooms, and food and beverages. Once the village gatehouse was completed in 1933, visitors boarded horse drawn carriages and were transported to the Clinton Inn welcoming center. But this practice was soon abandoned; there were simply too many people and those working at the Village feared the horses would be overworked. Instead, the visitors were asked to walk over the 260-acre area. That same year, Ford added the 1890s "Owl" Night Lunch Wagon, which he used to frequent when living in Detroit. The Village stayed open seven days a week, year-round, until 1941.

⁶⁵ Wacchorst, 167.

⁶⁶ Upward, 76.

On opening day, Ford's list of famous guests could also view the beginnings of the Edison Institute Museum, which combined the industrialist's interest in the history of common men and the traditional museum display (see Introduction). But Ford used Greenfield Village to play with the past. It was a physical representation of his worldview.

The Landscape of Ford's Mind

Henry Ford's true political, moral, and historical beliefs will always remain something of a mystery, but biographers who have studied him do illuminate some of the inner workings of the minds of one of America's most famous, and at times infamous, industrialists. Ford was not a contemplative man. Biographies and oral histories conducted with his colleagues confirm that the Filvver King was impetuous, impatient, and easily distracted, making rigorous study uninteresting for him.⁶⁷ Occasionally insightful, but often wrongheaded, Ford's views were an amalgam of the historical and cultural period in which he lived. Like many other Americans, Ford grew up at the end of the Victorian era as the country shifted from an agrarian to an industrial economy that he helped to create. Despite his love of machinery and his appreciation of technology which, according to at least one scholar bordered on mysticism,⁶⁸ Ford, like many of his fellow Americans, was wary of the cultural shifts that accompanied the technological boom. As immigrants from Eastern Europe poured into the country, as women challenged

⁶⁷ See, for example, Watts and Neil Baldwin, *Henry Ford and the Jews: the Mass Production of Hate* (New York: Perseus Books, 2001).

⁶⁸ William Greenleaf, *From These Beginnings: The Early Philanthropies of Henry and Edsel Ford, 1911-1936* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), 97.

conventional gender roles, as the public culture of city-life replaced country and small town life as the norm, Ford responded by embracing some of these changes and vehemently rejecting others. Greenfield Village, during Ford's lifetime, mirrored Ford's interior world; when it opened, Greenfield Village was a physical representation of Ford's simultaneously progressive and bigoted views.

Oral and institutional histories of Greenfield Village trace its origins not to 1929, but to 1916 when, thirteen years earlier, an editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* labeled Ford an "ignorant idealist." When asked whether the United States was justified in its choice to use the military to resolve border disputes with Mexico, Ford responded that it was "better to put the Mexican peon to work... then there would be no more talk of a revolution. Villa would become a foreman, if he had brains. Carranza might be trained as a good time keeper."⁶⁹ Ford went on to say that America was "cowardly and unjust" for using military action in the matter.⁷⁰ The *Tribune* responded by castigating Ford, who had established himself as a pacifist by this time, and Ford, encouraged by his colleagues, filed a million-dollar lawsuit.

Three years later a jury in Mount Clemens, Michigan heard both sides. To prove that Ford was indeed "ignorant," attorney Elliott G. Stevenson placed Ford on the stand and spent weeks asking him a variety of questions that demanded "intellectual" responses. When it came to a series of questions aimed at testing Ford's knowledge of American history, he failed miserably. Some of his most popularly discussed mistakes include his erroneous dating of the Revolutionary War to 1812, and assertion that Benedict Arnold was a writer. As Stevenson neared the end of his questions, though,

⁶⁹ Baldwin, 87.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

Ford contested the significance and importance of the cross-examination by challenging the veracity of history as a discipline. What did it matter, he asked, when “History is more or less the bunk?” Ford would spend years trying to reframe and clarify this comment; what he meant, he later explained, was that *written* history, the history represented in textbooks was “bunk.” Later, he would go further, and argue that what he really meant was that textbooks ignored the most important histories, which in his mind were the histories of technology and invention, and of the farmer. A brief detour and examination of Ford’s work at his company, and more specifically his treatment of his racially and ethnically diverse workforce is useful in further explicating and understanding his worldview.⁷¹

At the time of the trial, Ford’s popularity was at its height due to his institution of the Five Dollar Day in 1914. The Five Dollar Day was not Ford’s idea. James Couzens and Horace Rackham presented Ford with a plan to increase efficiency and productivity by shortening the workday to eight hours and raising the basic wage from three dollars a day to five. Any male worker over the age of twenty-two, regardless of his color or nationality, would receive this wage. Ford took full credit, however, and announced that the idea was the “greatest revolution in the matter of rewards for workers ever known to the industrial world.” Although many criticized the Five Dollar Day, calling it a hand out, Ford countered by arguing that this was not “easy money.” This act made Ford a celebrity not only among workers, but also among social and economic progressives.⁷²

Earning five dollars a day required following Ford’s rules of behavior as established by his Sociological Department, whose activities best represent his prejudices

⁷¹ Baldwin, 87.

⁷² Ibid., 37.

and his personal efforts to Americanize his workforce. Headed by Mark Marquis and with a staff of fifty “advisors,” the department soon grew to 160 men.⁷³ Their goal was to establish appropriate standards of behavior for Ford workers. Employees of Ford were subject to routine domestic inspections, in which advisors assessed and rated an employee’s level of cleanliness, thriftiness, and general ability to follow the “path of righteousness.”⁷⁴ The Sociological Department’s activities and goals were not unlike those of many social and political progressives of this period. Armed with their faith in science and progress, people like Jane Addams, Margaret Sanger, and others worked either to convince or, in Ford’s case, force Eastern European immigrants—many of whom were Jews—to abandon many of their cultural values and mores and to replace them with more “scientific” and efficient habits. As discussed earlier, historic houses, and World’s Fair period rooms were similarly used to convey messages about how one’s personal life should be lived, and Ford would also recreate domestic, business, and laboratory interiors at the Village. Ford’s rising anti-Semitism during this period, the influx of African American and Eastern European immigrants, who were now working in his factories, and the general spirit of Americanization that fed white middle-class anxieties, similarly motivated Ford. Thus, the landscape of the Village at least implicitly supports a narrative of Americanization, a narrative which was explicitly stated at the school Ford established in Highland Park.

An extension of the Sociological Department, the Americanization School at Highland Park hosted a graduation ceremony that perhaps best symbolizes the worldview of race and ethnicity that Ford’s Greenfield Village would also imply through its

⁷³ Baldwin, 38.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 38.

representation of the past. In a baseball field near the Highland Park plant, a wood, canvas and paper-mache “Melting Pot” was constructed at second base. Flights of steps on either side led to the rim of this pot. Seated in grandstands, families and co-workers looked on as a brass band played and a procession entered from a gate on the side of the field. Immigrants dressed in their native garb, singing their national songs, and dancing folk dances marched forth and one of Ford’s employees, Clinton DeWitt, dressed as Uncle Sam, led the group up to a ladder, where they descended into the “pot.” Soon, these immigrants re-emerged as “Americans,” wearing the Ford Motor Company badge, and sporting derby hats, coats, pants, vests, stiff collars, and polka-dot ties.⁷⁵

Aside from staged representations such as this one, Ford’s preservation activities at the Wayside Inn in South Sudbury, Massachusetts, and his decision to include buildings that depicted the life and work of William Holmes McGuffey at the Village, are emblematic of the ways in which Ford’s views on ethnicity also shaped his representations of the past. The Village became not only a celebration of self-made men, but also a representation of a landscape without ethnicity. Just as Worlds Fairs period rooms and historic houses sent both explicit and implicit messages, so did Ford’s forays into representing the past. After restoring the Wayside Inn, Ford used it as a school to Americanize recent immigrants.

Prior to the Village’s opening to the general public in 1934, Ford purchased the Wayside Inn, the colonial tavern located in South Sudbury, Massachusetts, which Henry Wadsworth Longfellow immortalized in his *Tales of the Wayside Inn* (1863). Soon after purchasing the building, Ford opened it to the public as an inn and a museum replete with

⁷⁵ Baldwin, 94.

furnishings from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. On the second floor, a ballroom allowed the Fords and their friends to engage in one of their favorite pastimes, dressing and dancing as they imagined the colonials had. The inn also served, however, Ford's interest in providing "foreigners who come to us... [with a] way of finding out what is the real [pioneer] spirit of this country."⁷⁶ Scholar William B. Rhoades notes that the Daughters of the American Revolution sent groups of Italian immigrant children to the inn from the Americanization departments of local schools. Five years later, Ford added the Wayside Inn Boys School to the enterprise. Thirty boys who had been former inmates of state schools, including Jews, were housed in a remodeled eighteenth-century house near the inn. It was essentially a trade school for young men, the most accomplished of which could expect employment with the Ford Motor Company in Detroit upon graduation. The *New York Times* reported that boys from a variety of national and "racial stocks," attended the school and were able to "live in apparent harmony with one another and with the eighteenth century pine, pewter and Puritanism of their surroundings."⁷⁷ Rhoades points out that Ford's antiquing and construction of schools, which expanded from the Wayside Inn to include a variety of locations at the height of his philanthropy, was part of broader anxieties that shaped the American landscape during the early part of the twentieth-century.⁷⁸ Greenfield Village, then, although quite different from Wayside Inn, can be similarly interpreted as, at least in part, a landscape that mirrors Ford's ideas about Americanization. His inclusion of the home

⁷⁶ Samuel Crowther, "Henry Ford: Why I Bought the Wayside Inn," *Country Life* 47, no. 6 (April 1925): 44.

⁷⁷ *New York Times*, March 4, 1928.

⁷⁸ William B. Rhoades, "The Colonial Revival and the Americanization of Immigrants," in Alan Axelrod, ed., *The Colonial Revival in America* (Markham, Ontario: Winterthur, 1985), 359.

of William Holmes McGuffey indicates that the Village, too, was shaped by Ford's prejudices.

One of Ford's first interests in antiquing grew out of his and Clara's shared love of the McGuffey Reader series. Both had grown up reading the series in their schoolhouses, and remembered the moral lessons of this educational series as imperative in shaping their behavior and values. In 1932, Henry Ford traveled to western Pennsylvania to view William Holmes McGuffey's birthplace. The log cabin was no longer a home; it was being used as alternately as a spinning room and a sheep barn. Cutler replaced some of the missing and deteriorated logs, and shipped it to Dearborn in November of 1932. During the next two years, the home was reconstructed and modified. When it opened on September 23, 1934, the 134th anniversary of McGuffey's birth, relatives of McGuffey were in attendance and the ceremony was broadcast by NBC. The readers that Ford remembered with such nostalgia, however, were perhaps not so innocent. Historian Neil Baldwin explains Ford's affection for the McGuffey series as a broader indication of Ford's equation of the pastoral with utopia and his anti-Semitism. In the McGuffey reader stories, young boys learn the value of hard work and that the world's moral canvas is black and white. The representation of ethnicity in the books is also, Baldwin suggests, fraught with anti-Semitism.⁷⁹

Although many excerpts from classic plays appeared in the McGuffey series over the decades, only three were chosen for inclusion from Shakespeare: Marc Antony's speech over Cesar's body in *Julius Caesar*, Hamlet's report to his friends after encountering his father's ghost, and Shylock's humiliating defeat from *The Merchant of*

⁷⁹ The Henry Ford, "William Holmes McGuffey," *The Henry Ford Museum*, 2006, http://www.thehenryford.org/village/porchesandparlors/mcguffey_birthplace/default.asp.

Venice.⁸⁰ In the spring of 1914, Temple Beth El Reform Rabbi Leo Franklin led Detroit's B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in a campaign to eliminate the required study and teaching of *The Merchant of Venice* in local public schools. Rabbi Franklin argued that the image of the "avaricious, revengeful and bloodthirsty Jew" must be banished from classroom discourse.⁸¹ In the fall, the ADL sent circulars to school superintendents in cities with populations of 10,000 or more explaining why *The Merchant of Venice* was unfit for classroom instruction. They claimed, for example, that the play served to "increase misunderstanding of Jews by non-Jews... because Shylock is erroneously pictured as typical of all Jews... [and] Shylock has become an unhappy symbol of Jewish vindictiveness, malice, and hatred."⁸² Ford, Rabbi Franklin's friend and neighbor in Detroit, argued that this national lobbying was a personal affront to William Holmes McGuffey, a man he revered and respected.⁸³

Greenfield Village's reconstruction of the past, as the preservation of the McGuffey home portends, similarly excluded the wide range of ethnicities that comprised so much of the Detroit-metro-area population during the early twentieth century. While the city was and remains unique in its mix of Polish, Greek, Italian, and Mexican neighborhoods, Greenfield Village is comprised of the homes and businesses of Americans with English, Scottish, or, in the case of the slave cabins and the Mattox house, African American ancestry. By the 1920s, Ford established himself as an anti-Semite through the publication of his newspaper the *Dearborn Independent* and the release of *The International Jew: The World's Foremost Problem* (1920). And in 1937 he

⁸⁰ Baldwin, 6.

⁸¹ As qtd. in Baldwin, 6.

⁸² As qtd. in Baldwin, 7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.

had accepted the Grand Cross of the German Eagle from Adolf Hitler; an award he refused to return even after World War II began.⁸⁴ Anti-Semitism coupled with the xenophobia expressed in the activities of the Sociological Department thus makes his exclusion of Eastern Europeans from the Village landscape unsurprising.

In many ways, the Village also reflected Ford's view that the small town landscape and decentralization were an economic, social, and cultural answer to the problems of the industrialized city. Between 1918 and 1944 Ford also established 19 "village industries" in small towns across Michigan to further his vision of interrelated, but largely self-sustaining communities.⁸⁵ But Ford was not alone in his nostalgia for rural landscapes and the common folk that inhabited them. Throughout the 1930s, Americans across the political spectrum supported artists, writers, and politicians such as Norman Rockwell, Woody Guthrie, Thornton Wilder, and Huey Long, who celebrated small towns and their residents. The New Deal's Works Progress Administration programs not only documented poverty and its devastating affects, but also celebrated rural America's folk art and music. The Village similarly paid homage to the lives of ordinary people and folk heroes *before* they were famous.

Like Ford, patrons approached and encountered the Village with their own, often contradictory worldviews. Even visitors skeptical of Ford, then, could have read the site in alternative ways. They might interpret the imagined small town as a utopic alternative to the industrialized city plagued by ethnic, racial, social, and economic conflict. The Village may have offered an ethnically diverse labor force with a representation of the

⁸⁴ Baldwin, 284.

⁸⁵ Howard P. Segal, *Recasting the Machine Age: Henry Ford's Village Industries*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005).

past to which working and middle-class Americans could link their personal and family histories. Or, visitors' interest in the depiction of the lives of inventors and farmers may have not only appealed to Americans nostalgia for the small town, but also to their fascination with seeing their own pasts represented on an historic landscape, and their longing for personal futures that were never realized. With just one small change, visitors could have also been a Ford or an Edison. A consideration of why the site was popular, despite Ford Motor Company's controversial actions during the Great Depression, begins with a discussion of the public images of the two celebrities that dominated much of the site's landscape: Henry Ford and Thomas Edison.

Celebrities of Modernity: Henry Ford and Thomas Edison

Henry Ford

Throughout the 1920s, Ford the man had received more press than his company, across the country, and even more so in Detroit. *The New York Times*, which often omitted negative stories about Ford, ran an average of 145 stories per year.⁸⁶ In 1922, *The Detroit Free Press* published an average of 34 stories per month, and this number only grew throughout the 1920s.⁸⁷ Ford had carefully cultivated an image that linked him to the common man, the interests of the people, and a supporter of hard working families. When the Village opened in 1929, Ford was at the peak of his celebrity.

⁸⁶ David L. Lewis, *The Public Image of Henry Ford: An American Folk Hero and His Company* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976), 213.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 213.

As the Great Depression enveloped the nation, however, and Ford reacted to the New Deal and unionism, his reputation was challenged. Still, by 1937, the image of his company remained in good standing with most of America. That year, the Curtis Publishing Company conducted a nationwide survey asking respondents to rate twelve of the country's leading corporations as to their labor and pricing policies, the quality of their research and new products, their profit structure, importance, and concern for the public interest. The Ford Motor Company was given top rankings in the categories of labor and pricing spheres, despite the fact that it had not, according to David Lewis's research, "made news" in the labor or pricing areas for eight years. Two-thirds of respondents judged Ford's labor policies superior to those of any other corporation, and more than two-fifths rated Ford first in the pricing sphere. Only the Bell Company was judged as better at operating in the public's best interest than Ford Motor Company. Lewis writes that considering all categories of the poll, Ford's reputation and prestige among the American public was exceeded only by General Electric and Bell. Yet the 1930s brought a series of challenges to the image of Ford the man. The ways in which Ford managed to maintain his public image as a man of the people and folk hero help explain the conception of Ford with which visitors approached the Village.⁸⁸

In 1933, the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) was signed into law. The emergency measure declared that codes of fair competition—which included rates of pay, hours of work, working conditions, and the fixing of prices—were to be drafted for the various industries of the country. Any industry which failed to present an acceptable code would be provided one by the administration. Most controversially, Section 7A

⁸⁸ Lewis, 211.

proclaimed the right of employees to organize and to engage in collective bargaining free from employer interference. While other auto-manufacturers signed, Henry Ford refused, arguing that the code would threaten the open shop that prevailed in his plants and that the legislation effectively passed control of his business to the government. He further protested that his company already exceeded the code's requirements in wages, hours of labor, and working conditions.⁸⁹

Hugh S. Johnson, the administrator of the National Recovery Administration and other government officials, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, to boycott the purchase of Ford vehicles.⁹⁰ In fact, as long as Ford complied with the new legislation, there was little else the government could do. Much of the public, however, continued to side with Ford. For example, Lewis points out, sales at the Ford Motor Company actually increased between 1933 and 1934.⁹¹ For many, Ford's refusal to sign embodied his rugged individualism. Journalist Garet Garrett explained that without the Ford Motor Company, it would be written that the "surrender of the American business to government was unanimous, complete, and unconditional."⁹² Will Rogers quipped, "you can take the rouge from the female lips, the cigarette from the raised hands, the hot dog from the tourist's greasy paw, but when you start jerking the Fords out from under the traveling public you are monkeying with the very fundamentals of American life."⁹³ Ford must have felt vindicated when the NIRA was ruled unconstitutional in May of 1935.

⁸⁹ Lewis, 242.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 242-243.

⁹¹ Ibid., 246.

⁹² As qtd. in Lewis, 246.

⁹³ As qtd. in Lewis, 246.

Another challenge to Ford's personal image as a friend of the worker came during his stand-off with organized labor. While the ruling against the NIRA seemed to herald the end of advances by unionists, the passage in July of the National Labor Relations Act and the establishment of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ensured that it was just the beginning. Employees were given the right to self-organize and to engage in collective bargaining under protection of the law. When the United Automobile Workers (UAW) joined forces with the newly formed Committee for Industrial Organization, later the Congress for Industrial Organizations (CIO), preparation for invasion of the auto-industry began. The UAW-CIO coalition launched its organizing drive at the Ford Motor Company on May 26, 1937 under the leadership of Walter Reuther. The success of the Flint sit-down strike at General Motors motivated union organizers to attempt the same at Ford. But as organizers attempted to distribute pamphlets to Ford workers, they were attacked by members of the Ford Service Department, which had been established to control the auto-plant's workers and keep the unions from organizing them. Many were severely wounded and the event was captured on film by photographers. Company men also attacked the press, guaranteeing that the viciousness of the attack would be reported in its entirety. Titled the "Battle of the Overpass" by the press, the NLRB filed a claim in which they documented Ford Motor Company's violation of virtually every unfair labor practice outlined in the Wagner Act. William J. Cameron, Ford's public relations officer, attempted to recast the altercation as an effort by amateur revolutionists to incite a riot, but in the Detroit press, Ford took a public beating. The company was found guilty and ordered to cease in its efforts to interfere with employees' organizing rights. Twenty-three employees fired for their involvement in union activities were to be reinstated and

given back pay. Ford officials appealed the case, but in 1940, they were pronounced guilty of unfair labor practices in nine plants.⁹⁴

In the court of public opinion, however, Ford maintained loyal followers among many Americans. In 1937 the Curtis Publishing Company also found that 59.1% of Americans believed the Ford Company treated its workers better than any other firm. The same year *Fortune* magazine found Ford the “most popular” industrial figure in America. In 1938, the American Institute of Public Opinion published a report in which 66 % of Americans of voting age were in agreement with Ford in his dispute with the UAW. Further, as the UAW-CIO prepared a new organization drive, they found that Ford’s black workers were often more sympathetic to their employer. Lewis argues that many African American laborers were wary of placing their future in the hands of the white officials who led the UAW-CIO. During the “Battle of the Overpass,” Ford staff had effectively courted black workers and many had participated on the company’s side. Ford had also established a longstanding relationship with many of the city’s black ministers. Ford took this moment to remind clergyman of the company’s deliveries of coal to their churches. Ford had hired thousands of men sent to the company’s employment offices with letters of recommendation, which he also used as leverage. Leaders of the Detroit Interdenominational Ministers’ Alliance, which united leaders of the city’s black churches, wrote to Ford promising resistance to the UAW-CIO and assuring him that he could “count on [their] group almost one hundred percent.”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Lewis, 247.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 251-261.

In her study of suburban fantasy and white flight in Detroit, Amy Maria Kenyon explains the relationship between Ford and the black community.⁹⁶ When Ford reopened the Rouge plant, in 1933, black workers were rehired with a four-dollar-a-day pay scheme. One dollar was paid to the workers in cash, while the remaining three were “saved” for the “rehabilitation” of the Inkster community.⁹⁷ Inkster, located adjacent to Dearborn, provided residencies for many of the Rouge Factory’s black workers. Ford established a public commissary, reopened the public school, and provided men with seeds and garden allotments and women with sewing machines.⁹⁸ Ford hired Edward Cutler, chief architect at the Village, to prepare drawings for a school in Inkster during the Great Depression. Cutler explained Ford’s relationship to the black community as one of fondness and even love.⁹⁹ In contrast, in a history of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (1975), Georgkas Surkin described Ford’s efforts in the context of racism:

Racism had always been used as a weapon against unions in the auto industry, and Henry Ford had systemized the practice. Beginning in the late 1920s, Ford made it a rule to employ blacks in his factory at every level in the same percentage as that of the general population. Ford helped finance the all-black suburb of Inkster and always provided low-paying jobs to any unemployed residents. This new style “plant-ation” owner also cultivated a select group of black clergy and professionals, but his motives were strictly business ones... Dearborn, the city which Ford built... the headquarters of the Ford empire, prohibited black residents.¹⁰⁰

Consequently, Ford’s seemingly progressive efforts, like his Sociological Department, were rooted in a particular brand of racism. Still, Ford’s image among black residents

⁹⁶ Amy Maria Kenyon, *Dreaming Suburbia: Detroit and the Production of Postwar Space and Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004).

⁹⁷ Kenyon, 131.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁰⁰ As qtd. in Kenyon, 135.

was complex. When Ford died in 1947, the city's black newspaper, *The Michigan Chronicle*, ran the following headline on the front page: "Pay Tribute to Ford: Many Negroes Were Numbered Among Friends."¹⁰¹

By 1940, however, Ford was facing a highly organized effort to unionize the Rouge and company officials feared for the corporation's image. Between 1937 and 1940, the public relations team made efforts to publish materials about the company's labor practices, but in late 1940, staff released several ads promoting Ford Company's stance on wages, hours, and working conditions as fair and honest. Despite such publicity efforts, the union gathered strength amongst employees. By June 19, 1941, Ford Motor Company had drawn up a formal contract with the UAW. Ford agreed to the UAW's request for wage increases, the abolition of Ford Service, a seniority system governing layoffs and rehiring, reinstatement of employees fired for union activity, overtime pay, and a shop steward system. Ford also agreed to operate his plants as a union shop—all workers were required to join the union as a condition of employment—and to extract union dues from wages and transmit them to the UAW treasury. The *Detroit News* described the event as "one of the biggest sensations in the history of American labor relations." In the press, it seemed that Ford had recovered. During the war years, Lewis notes, opinion surveys showed that Americans continued to regard Ford as the auto-company that treated its "workers best."¹⁰²

Ford's image survived severe challenges during the Great Depression, but in the minds of many, he remained a folk hero. Ford continued to embody the rugged

¹⁰¹ Russ J. Cowans, "Pay Tribute to Ford: Many Negroes Were Numbered Among Friends," *The Michigan Chronicle*, April 12, 1947, Sect. A.

¹⁰² As qtd. in Lewis, 265.

individualism and self-made manhood that remained strong cultural values. His refusal to sign the NIRA could be read as a sign that he did not empathize with workers, but, as national surveys showed, others interpreted this act of defiance as an example of independence and strength. Although the UAW-CIO did mount an effective campaign, when Ford capitulated he was forgiven the “Battle of the Overpass.” And in the black community, clergymen indebted to Ford waged their own campaign on his behalf. The visitor who arrived at the Village from Detroit, then, throughout the 1930s and during the war years likely had mixed feelings about Ford. For others from outside the metro-area, it appeared that Ford retained his positive image. For small town residents and farmers, Ford was much like them, a hard worker with homespun values.

Thomas Edison

For much of the 1930s, the Village was in more ways a shrine to Thomas Edison than to Ford (see Figure 1.2). Edison died two years after the Village opened, and by 1931, his celebrity had also extended to cultural icon. Wyn Wacchorst examines the evolution of Edison as a cultural symbol by analyzing 62 books, 21 pamphlets, 326 chapters and excerpts, 936 periodical articles, 3,218 newspaper items, 148 book reviews, four plays, five films, and four television documentaries. Wacchorst notes, for example, that in 1935, when Robert and Helen Lynd returned to Middletown, respondents linked Edison with George Washington and Abraham Lincoln as the third greatest American. In 1945, the National Opinion Research Center found that Edison placed fourth after Franklin Roosevelt, Lincoln, and Washington as the greatest man who ever lived in this



Figure 1.2: Thomas Edison statue in front of Menlo Park machine shop at the Village. The statue was cast in 1949, two years after Ford's death and demonstrates the ways in which the site is not only a celebration of Ford, but of Edison and his contributions to America's technological and economic progress. Photo by author, 2006.

country. The same year a Gallup poll ranked Edison sixth behind Jesus, FDR, Lincoln, Washington, and General MacArthur as the “greatest person, living or dead, in world history.”¹⁰³ According to Wacchorst, Americans’ fascination with Edison is the result of two forms of nostalgia. In the first, Edison represents the “pastoral vision of a pre-industrial America.” The rugged individualism inspired by the pastoral setting made possible a man like Edison.

Wacchorst points to the 1940 film *Edison the Man* as exemplary of this myth. The film, starring Spencer Tracy as Edison traces the Menlo Park project and culminates with the first successful lighting of the incandescent lamp. In these final scenes, as the light continues to burn, Edison joins his men around an organ to sing “Sweet Genevieve.” The camera then pans to the window and the moonlit countryside. The audience notices Edison’s wife sitting by the window of their adjacent cottage, listening happily. Wacchorst argues that the lighting of the lamp, celebrated in the film, in other written accounts, and re-enacted at the Village, strengthens the suggestion that “technological triumph... [is] inseparable from the romantic individualism of an earlier and simpler America.”¹⁰⁴

The second nostalgia, Wacchorst writes, is a response to the neotechnic, electronic era, and envisions “not the winding rivers and rolling hills so much as the freedom of the individual to be as audacious and supremely self-confident as Edison.” “It is,” she continues, “a reaction less to the physical than to the psychological consequences of technology.”¹⁰⁵ For Wacchorst, the myth of Edison is emblematic of the anxieties that

¹⁰³ Wacchorst, 6.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 206.

accompanied the Industrial Revolution and the Great Depression. Americans were increasingly tied to and dependent on one another as they worked in factories and as federal government extended its powers. Wacchorst writes:

The disappearance of the frontier was symbolic, but far more significant was the national organism, and the multitude of urban organisms within it, created by the transportation and communications revolutions. Fragmenting experience and forcing men into tiny specialties of “expertise,” the organism became ever more bureaucratized and interdependent, reducing individuals to childlike dependence on one another and on technology.¹⁰⁶

The myth of Edison offered a salve to the anxieties produced by technological advancement because it celebrated a man who had tamed the machine. Above all, though, he was a man with which Americans felt a kinship. After his death, Martin A. Rosanoff, a former assistant, wrote an article for *Harper’s Monthly* which Wacchorst contends depicted a much more human Edison than previously promoted in the press; an image that would dominate representations of the man after 1932. Rosanoff wrote that:

The great American family felt that he was one of them and not remote and above them, and they turned to him in his latter days for counsel in homely things... [His] heroism is something we can understand as we cannot understand the processes of intellect which produced the high discoveries of pure science or the master works of the arts. We feel closer to Edison than to Einstein.¹⁰⁷

Many, likely white middle-class Americans, then, viewed Edison as a man not unlike themselves. In this way, he also inspired a third kind of nostalgia that manifested itself in the messages sent at the Village. If Edison was not so different from the visitor, particularly the white male visitor, than they, too, could have been a “great man.” But whatever their race, gender, or ethnicity, patrons approached the Village with these public myths in mind. A discussion of what appeared on the Village landscape and when

¹⁰⁶ Wacchorst, 206.

¹⁰⁷ As qtd. in Wacchorst, 181.

offers a useful starting point for considering what other buildings and narratives visitors encountered and how why they enjoyed them.

Building the Village

Actual plans for the construction of the Village came from the mind of Edward J. Cutler. Cutler had been trained as an artist at the Cincinnati Art Academy. After graduating, he found employment at the Hobbs Leaded Glass Company in London, Ontario where he worked from 1903-1908. After starting a business of his own, he moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, to work for Bedgardus-Wiggins and Company where he continued to work in the leaded glass business. A serious head injury and a decline in the glass business after World War I led Cutler and his family to move to Detroit in 1915, where Cutler had connections in the Ford Motor Company. Cutler's glass-cutting skills led to a position as a windshield cutter at the Highland Park plant. Soon afterwards, though, Cutler was placed in charge of window maintenance for the entire building. Cutler requested and eventually received a transfer to the drafting department and in 1922 he and his drafting group relocated to Dearborn where they worked on Model T designs in one of the old Tractor Buildings. Ford often spent time with Cutler's group as the Tractor Building was also the holding area for Ford's antiquing projects. The two men struck up a friendship when Cutler was recommended by his drafting boss to design a windmill for Ford that was to be placed on the Fairlane property. Cutler's ability to sketch quickly and in great detail impressed Ford, and soon Cutler was involved in Ford's other historical projects. Cutler sketched several of the buildings that

were restored at Wayside Inn in 1924. The same year Cutler made sketches for restoration of the Botsford Tavern just outside of Detroit, where Ford had danced as a young man. When Ford began purchasing buildings for the Village, he decided that Cutler's abilities made him the perfect architect for the project.¹⁰⁸

Cutler's informal training and his subordinate position to Ford speaks to the method that guided restoration, reconstruction, and construction projects at the Village. Cutler initially drew up plans based on a New England Village, but Ford altered these plans numerous times. Ford even asked Cutler to move buildings after they had been built if he found their location disconcerting in any way. Although Cutler certainly played a significant role in making Ford's vision a reality, then, the shape of the Village landscape started and ended with Ford.¹⁰⁹

When guests arrived at the Village between 1929 and 1947, what they saw and heard varied greatly as Ford was constantly adding new buildings to the site during this period (see Figures 1.3 and 1.4). He also often changed how tour guides were given. Initially, guides covered areas, each one leading groups of visitors through a series of set buildings. They were also given books with a wealth of information about those buildings that were open. In 1933, Ford began to recruit guides from the Henry Ford Trade School, and with a new source of manpower available, each building was assigned a specific guide. In this way, visitors were allowed to choose which parts of the Village they encountered by the time the site opened to the general public in 1934.¹¹⁰ By the time of Ford's death in 1947, the Village included almost 90 buildings. What they had in

¹⁰⁸ Ford R. Bryan, *Henry's Lieutenants* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 81-84.

¹⁰⁹ Upward, 22.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 76-77.



Figure 1.3: Map of the Village in 1934 when it opened to the public. The landscape looked, as Ford desired, like a “real” small town. Box 2, Accession #21, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

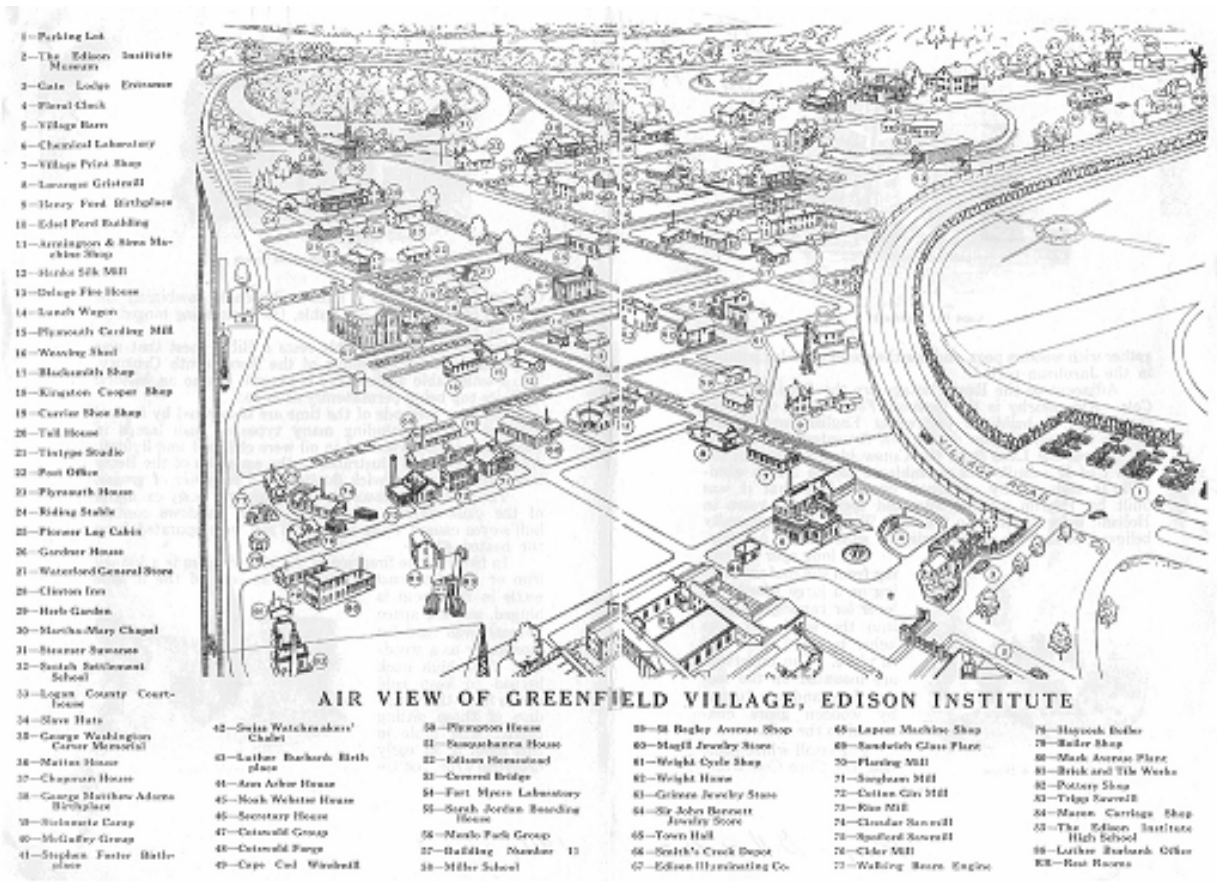


Figure 1.4: Map of the Village in 1947, the year of Ford’s death. By this time, the Village was largely complete; note the addition of numerous other buildings between 1934 and 1947. During the next several decades, only a few new buildings would be added, although the landscape would be rearranged as various administrations sought to impose a more cohesive historical narrative on the landscape. Box 1, Accession #21, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

common was at times difficult to discern; Ford chose to add structures to the landscape based on very few criteria. Ford's personal interest in the industry that the building represented often led to its inclusion at the Village. If a building represented Ford's past, or his friend's past, he often moved it to the site. And, if a building fulfilled his thematic vision for the Village, he would move it there. For example, in 1930, Charles Proteus Steinmetz, a colleague of Edison, donated his summer cabin to Ford.¹¹¹ That same year, Ford decided that the Village needed to represent the nation's English heritage and asked his agent Herbert Morton to locate a Cotswold stone house.¹¹² The home was shipped to the Village and remains there today. Other English buildings that were added in 1930 included the Cotswold Forge, which was built in 1600, and the Sir John Bennett Jewelry Store from London.¹¹³

During 1932, Ford focused his attentions on adding craft and small industrial buildings to the village. The 1810 Hanks Silk Mill from Mansfield, Connecticut, which produced the first machine-made silk in America, included recreated machinery. Ford also purchased the 1785 Kingston, New Hampshire Cooper Shop and the 1855 Tripp Sawmill from Lenawee County Michigan. The Tripp Sawmill's unique feature was that it housed an up-and-down saw, which was similar to the kind of machine Ford had used as a young man.¹¹⁴ In 1933, Ford added the first of several buildings associated with his own life: a replica of the workshop where he built his Quadricycle.¹¹⁵ Other buildings

¹¹¹ Upward, 82.

¹¹² Ibid., 83.

¹¹³ Ibid., 85.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 85.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 85.

representing America's craft and trade history included the addition of a tintype studio, a glassblowing shop, and a grist mill.¹¹⁶

Along with representing the evolution of machinery, Ford depicted the various forms of transportation Americans used prior to the arrival of the automobile, as well as his view of their domestic life. Horse-drawn carriages, locomotives, and the Suwanee, a steamboat, presented Americans with a "history" of transportation. Homes added to the site included that of William Holmes McGuffey and the Stephen Foster Memorial in 1934, two brick slave quarters from a plantation near Savannah, Georgia in 1935 (see Figures 1.5 and 1.6), and Noah Webster's home and Luther Burbank's birthplace in 1936.¹¹⁷ In 1942, George Washington Carver came to visit Ford to discuss possible uses for soybeans, with which Ford had begun to experiment. Prior to his arrival, Ford asked Carver to describe his birthplace, which led to the construction of a log cabin, the site's first replica. That same year, Ford was given the Susquehanna House, which had served as the main dwelling of a Maryland plantation during the late seventeenth century. Ford also purchased the Christopher Rousby home that year. Rousby had been a wealthy tax collector in colonial Maryland.¹¹⁸ In 1943, Ford added the Mattox House to the Village landscape, the home of an African American tenant farming family that lived in Ways, Georgia (see Figure 1.7). In the 1980s, as the Village administrators shifted and more professional historians were hired, the site would become an essential component of the African American Cultures Program.

¹¹⁶ Upward, 87.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 87 and 112.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.



Figure 1.5: The original Hermitage slave houses ca. 1930s near Savannah, Georgia. When the houses were moved to the Village, they would be restored to near pristine condition, very unlike their state here. Box 47, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.



Figure 1.6: Hermitage slave houses ca. 1935. Note that the houses are restored and rehabilitated, looking pristine in comparison to their original condition. Box 47, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

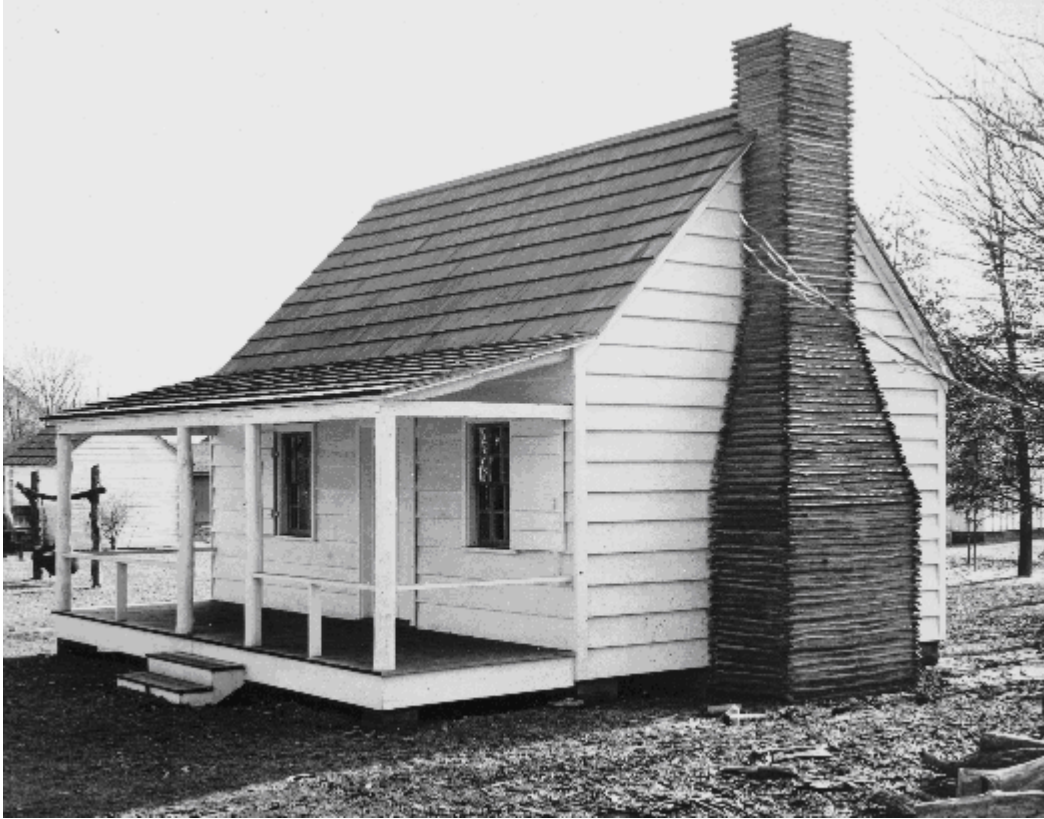


Figure 1.7: The Mattox House when it was added to the site in 1945. Like the Hermitage slave quarters, this building was painted and restored to look much better than its original condition. Box 53, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

Between 1937 and 1947, Cutler and Ford worked on what would become two of the site's main features: the Wright brother's home and cycle shop, and two more buildings representing Ford's modest beginnings. Orville Wright agreed to donate the Wright brothers' 1870 birthplace and their late nineteenth-century cycle shop from Dayton, Ohio (see Figure 1.8). Wright was heavily involved in the moving and reconstruction of the home and cycle shop; the dining and living rooms were decorated with furniture and displayed to the public based on his recommendations. Ford had wanted to include a display of the Wrights' first plane in the cycle shop, but was unable to convince Orville Wright to agree. Still, the restoration was completed and on April 16, 1938, children from the Village's school chorus performed before guests and a radio audience at the dedication ceremonies.¹¹⁹ Six years later, on the day before his 81st birthday—July 29, 1944—Ford moved the first building he had preserved to the Village: his family homestead. Then, in 1945 Ford and Cutler added one last building to represent Ford's life, the Ford Mack Avenue plant, Ford's first factory. These buildings were placed next to Edison's Menlo Park.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s commercial shops such as the Magill Jewelry Store, where Ford had repaired watches as a young man, and machine shops, like the Richart Wagon Shop from Macon, Michigan were added to the Village landscape. By the time of Ford's death, the Village contained over 90 buildings. It was onto this landscape that administrators would try to impose various historical narratives after Ford's death. Ford's notion of history followed few established rules. The site mixed buildings from different time periods and places. Buildings were often reconstructed and then improved,

¹¹⁹ Upward, 114.



Figure 1.8: The dedication of the Wright Brothers' Cycle Shop in 1938. Box 74, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

particularly when Ford chose to purchase buildings that were often literally falling apart. Cutler had no choice but to use new materials to preserve them. But it was this hodgepodge of buildings that people came to see in droves. A discussion of options for traveling to the Village, tour guide scripts, and descriptions by guides of visitors' encounters with the Village lends itself well to a contemplation of the Village's popularity during Ford's tenure as president of the site.

Visiting the Village (1929-1947)

Village records do not provide statistical information about where visitors came from, their economic status, their race, or their ethnicity during the 1930s. Still, archives do reflect many other aspects of the visitor experience. For example, the entrance fee was moderate. Patrons paid 25 cents for adults and 10 cents for children, the same price paid to see a movie in downtown Detroit.¹²⁰ Located adjacent to the Rouge Factory, patrons in the metro-area had access to the site via public transportation. According the Works Projects Administration Guide to Michigan, the cost of a bus ride from downtown Detroit to Greenfield Village was also 25 cents.¹²¹ Advertising for the Village targeted both the metro-area and a national audience. Each Wednesday, a nondenominational service was broadcast nationally from the Village Chapel over the WWJ radio station. These were occasionally accompanied by special guests such as Will Rogers.¹²² Such efforts were

¹²⁰ Upward, 76 and see advertising in 1930s editions of *Detroit Free Press*.

¹²¹ Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration, *Michigan: A Guide to the Wolverine State*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 210.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 100.

apparently successful; Village attendance rates continued to rise throughout the 1930s until the beginning of World War II (see Figure 1.9).

A review of the guide manuals and tour scripts, together with the accounts written by visitors in the “Greenfield Journals” between 1929 and 1947 are suggestive of the range of experiences that visitors to the site may have had.¹²³ Certainly, visitors did not usually have time to explore each building, and, until 1939, there was no one official tour script provided to the guides.¹²⁴ But the guide manual information and tour scripts do shed light on the visitor experience; guides would have relied on this information to shape their interpretation of a particular building. The representation of the past at each building focused on three narratives: the history of how and when Ford moved the building to the site, the history of the building itself, and the ways in which the building was emblematic of the ways in which other Americans lived.¹²⁵ The following discussion of the script for Edison’s Menlo Park and the Ford Homestead—two of the centerpieces of the Village—provides an emblematic sample of the kind of information with which visitors were provided. The “slave huts” are also discussed here because these are the only structures at the site that were displays of poverty and enslavement. This section examines the tour given in 1945, because by that date, the site was almost complete.

¹²³ “Guide Reference Manuals Records: 1929-1980,” Accession #141, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Annual Visitors to the Village 1934-1941

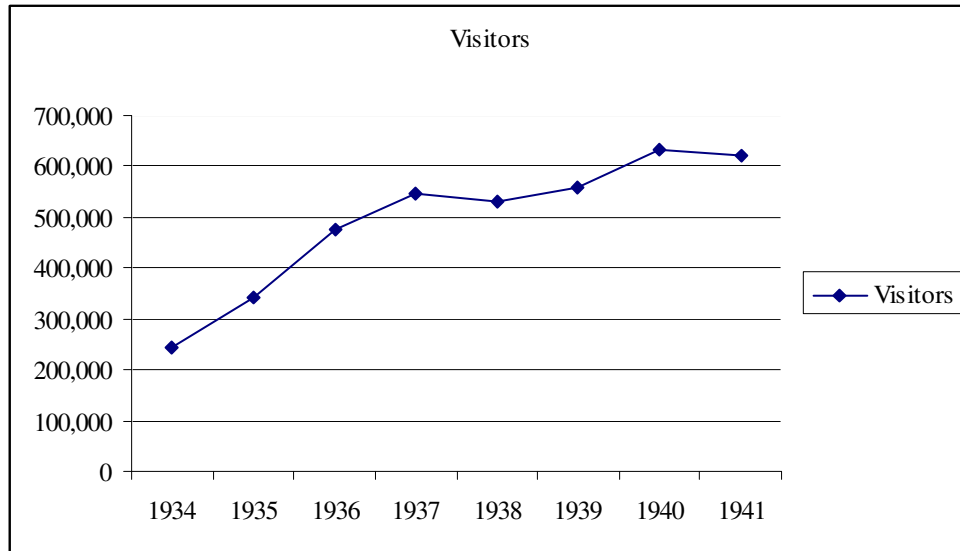


Figure 1.9: Graph created based on data collected from “Report on Greenfield Village Activities 1939,” Box 3, Accession #334, Edison Institute Records, The Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford and William Simmonds, “Departmental Communication, November 27, 1940,” Box 3, Accession #334, Edison Institute Records, The Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

In 1945, visitors began their tour in front of the Floral Clock. After being welcomed, the tour guide would explain that the tour would take almost two hours.¹²⁶ Patrons were encouraged to “forget the hustle and bustle of the atomic age and return briefly to the simple, rugged life” their “forefathers knew.”¹²⁷ The guide would then explain that patrons would cover 200 acres of a “typical 19th century village, with its craft shops, homes, schools and stores.”¹²⁸

Visitors would begin by encountering a series of shops: the Education Building, the Luther Burbank Garden Office, the Chemical Laboratory, Ford Barn, Village Print Shop, Loranger Gristmill, Edsel Ford Building and 58 Bagley Avenue, Armington and Sims, Sandwich Glass Plant, Hanks Silk Mill, Deluge Fire House, Owl Night Lunch Wagon, Plymouth Carding Mill, Edison Illuminating Company, Blacksmith Shop, Kingston Cooper Shop, Currier Shoe Shop, Toll House Shoe Shop, Smiths Creek Station, Tintype Studio, Plymouth House, and Post Office. Visitors would then transition to the Village Green, which included the Town Hall, Waterford General Store, Gardner House, a Pioneer Log Cabin, a Riding Stable, Clinton Inn, an Herb Garden, the Martha Mary Chapel, the Scotch Settlement School, Logan County Courthouse, and the Slave Huts. The Residential Section included the George Washington Carver Building, the Mattox House—erroneously described as a home “used by slave families’—the McGuffey birthplace and school, the Chapman House, Adams House, Steinmetz Camp, Stephen Foster Birthplace, the Steamer Suwanee, the Swiss Watchmakers Home, Burbank Birthplace, Edison Homestead, Ann Arbor House, Noah Webster Home, Secretary

¹²⁶ “Greenfield Village Tour: 1945,” Box 8, Accession #141, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

House, Cotswold Group, Plympton house, Susquehanna House, Fort Myers laboratory, Sarah Jordan Boarding House, Menlo Park, Sir John Bennett Jewelry Store, Grimm Jewelry Shop, Wright Homestead, Wright Brothers' Cycle shop, Magill Jewelry Store, and Miller School. Visitors would finally be led the home where Henry Ford grew up.

Here, the tour guide was encouraged to explain that the home, a “simple, mid-western farmhouse,” was like “many one still sees in America today.”¹²⁹ Visitors then learned the date (1944) that Ford moved the building to the site, a detail that would be similarly explained in many other buildings. Thus, the narrative on the tour was two-fold; guides presented patrons with the history and significance of the building, *and* the history of the site itself. The Sunday Parlor was described as a “very special room in the nineteenth-century American home—in both town and country.”¹³⁰ The script noted that the home was only used on Sundays, or on special occasions such as weddings and funerals. Next, patrons were led into the Everyday Parlor, where the guide explained Ford's affection for his mother, and that most of the “plain Victorian furnishings,” were “original with the home,” while the carpet was as close to what Ford grew up with as he could find.¹³¹ Visitors would then be told about the Estey Cottage organ, which after the home was restored Ford electrified so that Clara, his wife, could play it more easily. The guide then discussed the ways in which Ford's father was active in the community and drew visitors' attention to a flax wheel, a wooden bootjack, and a Currier and Ives print of Sherman and his generals.

¹²⁹ “Greenfield Village Tour: 1945.”

¹³⁰ “Village Tour 1944: Guide Reference Manuals 1929-1980,” Accession #141, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

After surveying the parlors, visitors were told that the dining room and Mary Ford's "spotless" kitchen were located in the back of the home. "The house," it was suggested the guide explain, "is really much larger than one would guess from outside." After exiting the house, and if tour guides had a small enough group, they could tell visitors to look into the dining room window to see the "small watchmaker's bench where in winter months when it was too cold in his upstairs bedroom, Henry would clean and repair watches beside the Starlight 25 stove."¹³² In many ways, the narrative at the Ford Homestead supports the public image that he sought to project as a moral, rugged individualist. But the guide's talk represents not just Ford's personal history, but also the history of the Village, and the history of America at large. This approach is representative of the multitudinous ways in which visitors might have interpreted the site: it is personal, general, and meta-historical.

Documenting the Visitor

Beginning in 1935 and through 1946, several guides wrote each day in a journal describing the activities of the Village.¹³³ These records provide the best glimpse into what daily routines were like at the Village, and what visitors were like. Certainly, this is not a direct path to understanding the visitor experience; it better reflects the views and experiences of tour guides. In fact, a majority of the journals center on the experience of guides rather than visitors. This section provides a sampling of the kinds of comments made about visitors, however, and includes all mentions of African American visitation.

¹³² "Village Tour: 1944."

¹³³ "Greenfield Village Journal 1934-1946," Box 1, Accession #105, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

This discussion continues with the awareness that visitor responses were filtered through the lens of white, male guides.

A review of these journals indicates that the Village staff members welcomed people from a wide range of ages and both white and black Americans. The journals also contain notes about daily activities, additions and alterations to the Village landscape and staff, and their encounters with patrons. Guide comments range from the mundane, “Many visitors complain of being hurried through the Village,” to the factual, “many questions are asked by visitors of the guides and drivers concerning the vehicles.”¹³⁴ But they often note the connections that visitors made between the buildings and their own lives. A panoramic view of several buildings on the Village landscape in 1938 indicates the ways in which the site represented a past that was clearly contemporary in many ways (see Figure 1.10). Exchanges between visitors and guides also reflected the familiarity of Village buildings. In 1934, Wilford noted that, “We still receive quite a few visitors who have seen the Waterford Store in its original setting. The store and the Inn are contestants for the position of the best known building to persons coming to the Village for the first time.”¹³⁵ One year later, a visitor made a similar comment about the Clinton Inn, “Mrs. W.F. Miller of Detroit while on her way through the village, remarked to a guide that Clinton Inn looked exactly as she remembered it since she had so often passed by the Inn while living in Ridgway—a town eight miles distant from Clinton. Mrs. Miller was indirectly complimenting the fine work done by our workmen in their reconstruction t

¹³⁴ “Greenfield Village Journal 1934-1946.”

¹³⁵ Ibid.



Figure 1.10: A view of the Village in 1938. Box 79, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Archives, The Henry Ford

job.”¹³⁶ While the guide interpreted this comment as praise for the restoration work, it also indicates the ways in which the buildings at the Village were enjoyed because of their typicality. In 1935, guide Jerome Wilford wrote that, “Mrs. Herman Rycraft of Detroit told a guide at the Scotch Settlement School that her husband had attended school with Mr. Ford.”¹³⁷ And the same year, “Mr. Peter Frochaska from Highland Park, on his way through the Village, was much interested in the Scotch Settlement School. Upon questioning, it turned out that he had attended the school as a youth together with Mr. Ford.”¹³⁸ An elderly woman visiting the Village in 1935 reportedly told her daughter that her father built the general store in the Village. And in 1939 Wilford noted that, “Both the Waterford General store and Smith’s Creek Depot brought pleasant memories of youth to F.D. Glebe of Gaines, Michigan,” who “was born at Clarkston, just a few miles from Waterford.”¹³⁹ That same year “William wilding, an 85-year-old shoemaker from Northampton, England, chatted with the Village shoemaker” and “recognized all the shoemaker’s tools, many similar to ones he had used.”¹⁴⁰ These comments point to the ways in which the buildings Ford included in the Village were very much a part of the contemporary landscape. The homes, school, and country store were not architectural reminders of a distant past, but reminiscent of everyday domestic and working experiences.

Another entry captures the diversity of visitors who frequented the Village. On August 16, 1935, Wilford wrote that:

¹³⁶ “Greenfield Village Journal 1934-1946.”

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Special guides have been busy with notables all day. A morning guest was Colonel Chur of the Chinese Army, to whom George Creighton showed the Village. The Colonel made snapshots of the Foster birthplace and the Suwanee, declaring them his favorites of the wealth of camera subjects. He was brought in by Wm. B. Stout. The New York policeman, Harris, who captured the Detroit criminal, Goodrich, was a visitor today, accompanied by two officers of the Detroit Homicide Squad. Harold said his party was pleased with their tour and wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Harris mentioned his enjoyable day on the radio talk tonight. The dictator of Greece and his party passed through the Institute this morning... About thirty colored people, children and adults of Detroit's Temple Baptist Church were morning visitors.¹⁴¹

Between 1929 and 1934 the people who came were primarily those who were invited, but when the doors opened to the general public, everyone from police officers to Greek dictators to African American school children and adults frequented the site.

Two buildings of interest to African American visitors were the brick slave cabins Ford obtained from the Hermitage Plantation near Savannah, Georgia. He placed them next to a courthouse where Abraham Lincoln had appeared while working as a traveling lawyer. These buildings were often left out of official tours or mentioned briefly. The "Slave Huts" and the Mattox House were the only representations of non-whites on-site. Ford initially placed them beside the Lincoln Court House. For those who did ask to see the buildings, guides were given the following suggested talk in 1937:

Fittingly placed beside the Logan County Courthouse, these two Slave Huts symbolize the work for which President Lincoln was best known—the emancipation of the slaves. The original brick, mortar, and timbers have been brought here from the "Hermitage," a plantation near Savannah, Georgia. On that plantation, a subsoil suitable for making brick was discovered, a brick yard was set up, and subsequently more than 50 such huts were erected in two semi-circles. About 20 years ago, the film director, David Griffith, used the plantation as a setting for his picture, "The Birth of a Nation."¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ "Greenfield Village Journal 1934-1946."

¹⁴² "Logan County Courthouse," Box 1, Accession #141, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

The plantation's claim to fame as a feature in "The Birth of a Nation" was later proved erroneous, but this remained part of the information with which guides could provide until 1941 and was likely made to garner interest in white patrons.¹⁴³

Visitors could also enter the slave huts where they would find that the two buildings were divided into three rooms by rough hewn pine partitions.¹⁴⁴ Visitors entering the first "hut" also encountered two chairs in the Windsor style and three burlap bags filled with straw, corn cobs, and corn silk.¹⁴⁵ What is most apparent, and would become a problem for administrators in the 1980s, is that these slave cabins were clearly anomalous. Brick slave cabins could have easily been read, particularly by white visitors, as evidence that slavery "wasn't so bad." Alternatively, however, for black visitors to the site, the inclusion of African American heritage in a museum setting might have been uplifting. It suggested that black history "counted." Wilford writes about one visitor's encounter with the cabins that:

In conducting a large colored party through the Village yesterday, the guide was asked by one lady to show her the slave huts. She informed him that her uncle had spent his life in one of the fifty-two huts located on Hermitage Plantation, near Savannah, the very place where those in the Village once stood.¹⁴⁶

In 1936, few representations of black Americans and enslavement were included in museum displays. For African Americans, these buildings may have offered a sense of history, one they did not find in other institutional displays of the American past. For

¹⁴³ "Village Tour 1941: Guide Reference Manuals 1929-1980," Box 2, Accession #141, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

¹⁴⁴ "Logan County Court House; Slave Huts; Town Hall; ca. 1937," Folder 11, Box 1, Accession #141, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ "Greenfield Village Journal 1934-1946."

many whites, encounters with these buildings may have been comforting because they were implicitly supportive of a racial hierarchy.

Patrons also actively responded to the site after their visit. From the moment it opened, Ford and Village staff received hundreds of letters from visitors asking if they might donate dishes, chairs, tables, lamps, and various other personal items to the Village for display. Inside the site's domestic spaces and shops, patrons encountered furniture and tools reminiscent of their own; they found familiar objects displayed as "history" and were eager to contribute and ultimately be included in that representation. In 1940, William Simmonds, one of the site's public relations officers, issued a memo noting that throughout the year visitors had requested that several buildings be opened including the Magill Jewelry Store (once located downtown). Visitors were eager to encounter familiar locations now recast as historical.¹⁴⁷

The Village and a Flexible Past: Multiple Nostalgias

In his analysis of Ford, mass production, and modernity, Ray Batchelor contemplates why Ford constructed the site:

Most of the buildings and objects at Greenfield Village exhibit characteristics of mass-produced commodities. As with many of the illusions borne by mass-produced objects, at Greenfield Village participation in the illusion provides for the transcendence, not only of place, but of time. Many of the buildings are typical, replicable, objects which may authentically represent all others of their type, because of their typicality. Standardisation is a measure of their authenticity. Thereafter, the same objects are imaginatively recreated to make them individual. The bicycle shop belonged to the Wright Brothers. It differs little from other bicycle shops in small-town America in the 1890s, but knowledge of its

¹⁴⁷ William Simmonds, "Departmental Communication, November 27, 1940," Box 1, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

associations lent it a further level of meaning to Ford and to millions of visitors. The generic is made individual by the associations brought to it.¹⁴⁸

Batchelor suggests that because the buildings at Greenfield Village were so typical, they could be encountered in highly individualistic ways. Clearly, Ford's anti-Semitism, racism, and anti-unionist position are embedded in the Village landscape. And certainly Americans with similar worldviews were part of the visitor population. But alternative readings of visitor encounters are plausible, and they suggest a more complex analysis of the ways in which Americans participate in and shape their encounters with representations of the past.

When visitors arrived to the Village, each arrived with his or her own worldview. Further, they likely held specific images of Ford and Edison in mind. Even if they disagreed with what the two men stood for, their expectations would have been guided by the multitudinous representations of these two men in mass media, ones which supported the narratives of rugged individualism and self-made manhood. They might interpret the imagined small town as a utopic alternative to the industrialized city plagued by ethnic, racial, social, and economic conflict. Or, the Village may have offered an ethnically diverse labor force with a representation of the past which working and middle-class Americans could link their personal and family histories to, finally defining their own pasts as "historic." At the Village, visitors could also link their personal pasts to those on display, particularly when they encountered domestic objects, homes, businesses, and laboratories that were familiar. For patrons who idealized the small town, the Village celebrated a middle-way between agrarian and city landscapes. Nostalgia for a pastoral

¹⁴⁸ Ray Batchelor, *Henry Ford: Mass Production, Modernism, and Design* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 142.

past could also commingle with a longing for what might have been. The futures of Edison and Ford might have also been the visitor's future, if not for some wrong turn made along the road from farmer to industrial laborer, for example. While Ford's construction of the site reflected his xenophobia and racism, its inclusion of a diverse range of contemporary buildings and material culture, its celebration of popular Americans, and its small town landscape ensured that visitors with different ethnic and racial heritages encountered a historical ground with a flexible narrative, one that could be read as interesting, meaningful, or comforting, because it invoked personal memories.

As the metro-area grew, the Village would become increasingly entangled in the politics of Detroit and its surrounding suburbs. The powerful public images of Ford and Edison would continue to shape visitor's encounters, but as the site developed a history of its own, its function would change. The role that the site played in the post-war era hinged on the ways in which increasingly tense and violent racial relations shaped the metro-area landscape.

CHAPTER TWO

The Village, the Suburb, and the City: Greenfield Village and the Post-War Urban Crisis (1948-1967)

Walt Disney, creator of the world-famous movie character, Mickey Mouse, visited the Village and Museum today. He showed great interest in everything mechanical, examining engines and old autos closely. He had a good time with Mr. Tremear while posing for a tin-type. In the Museum Theater he spoke for a few moments to the school children. He was accompanied by Mrs. Disney, and by Ben Sharpsteen, his chief animator. Wm. B. Stout was his host.¹⁴⁹

The Greenfield Village Journal, 1940

Walt Disney visited the Village on April 12, 1940, fifteen years before Disneyland opened its doors in Anaheim, California. During his visit, the cartoonist made mental notes of what he saw and even took time to have tin typist Tremear create a likeness of himself, antique in appearance, in one of the site's craft shops. Eight years later, on August 23rd, 1948, Disney returned to the Village, just one year after Ford's death. This time, he was accompanied by animator Ward Kimball. The two men had attended the Railroad Fair in Chicago and decided to visit the Village before returning home. Eight days later, on August 31, 1948, Disney wrote a memo articulating his ideas for a historical theme park. The connections between Disney's original ideas and the Village are striking:

¹⁴⁹ Cynthia Read Miller, "Explore and Learn: Walt Disney Visits Henry Ford's Greenfield Village," *The Henry Ford*, 2005, <http://www.thehenryford.org/exhibits/pic/2005/september.asp#more>. Karal Ann Marling traces the origins of Disney's inspiration for Disneyland to the 1948 Chicago Railroad Fair. She writes that the park's separate lands, "each with a historic or geographic theme reiterated by every aspect of the environment, down to the very shops and restaurants and the costumed employees in charge of them, recalled the "village" layout in Chicago with its period eateries and trading posts." In fact, this also reiterates the argument made in Chapter One, that the Village landscape drew on already familiar representations of the past. Certainly, it is also plausible that Disney was inspired by multiple venues. "Disneyland, 1955: Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream," *American Art*, 5 (1991): 183.

The Main Village, which includes the Railroad Station, is built around a village green or informal park... Around the park will be built the town. At one end will be the Railroad station; at the other end, the Town Hall...¹⁵⁰

When describing the purpose of his theme park, Disney argued that:

What this country really needs is an amusement park that families can take their children to. They've gotten so honky tonk with a lot of questionable characters running around, and they're not too safe. They're not well kept. I want to have a place that's as clean as anything could ever be, and all the people in it [his park] are first-class citizens, and treated like guests.¹⁵¹

Eric Avila points to Disney's dream of an amusement park built beyond the boundaries of the city and advertised to a clientele that stood in stark contrast to the patrons of sites like Coney Island as reflective of the "political culture of suburban whiteness" that proliferated during the post-war era.¹⁵²

Disney's visit to the Village and his goals for improving the amusement park offers a useful point of departure for a discussion of Greenfield Village's popularity between 1948, the year after Ford's death, and 1967, the year of the Detroit riot. When Disney opened Disneyland in 1955 in Anaheim, he envisioned it as an escape from the city. In fact, many whites fled racially and ethnically diverse urban centers for reasonably priced suburban homes. As the Los Angeles metro-area population exploded, Anaheim became enveloped in the area's suburban sprawl and was critiqued for its conformist and characterless architecture and its inability to inspire a sense of community. Ironically, one of Disneyland's primary features was Main Street, U.S.A., an idealized representation of small town life. During the 1960s, many Americans would turn to the architecture of the

¹⁵⁰ Miller.

¹⁵¹ "Walt Disney's Disneyland," *Just Disney.com*, 2002, http://www.justdisney.com/walt_disney/biography/w_disneyland.html.

¹⁵² Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2004), 114.

past for solutions to the perceived problems of suburbia. This chapter explores how the use and function of the Village became tied to the metro-area landscape of suburbanization and white flight.

A discussion of the race riot of 1943 begins an analysis of the decline of both downtown Detroit and its public places. As whites moved out of the inner city, they took with them a strong tax base and expendable income. Public parks like Belle Isle and private amusement spaces like Bob-Lo Island began a slow but steady decline. In surrounding suburbs, whites worked to keep blacks out of their residential neighborhoods. Dearborn became a particularly openly racist community when Orville Hubbard was elected mayor in 1942 and was continually re-elected until 1977. Hubbard waged a series of openly racist campaigns against African Americans. As Dearborn's reputation became linked to white flight and racism, the meaning and the function of the Village, located in this booming suburban community, also shifted.

By the 1960s, Americans from a wide range of social, economic, and political circles had begun to lament the ways in which newly constructed landscapes were corporate, lacking in character, and were often built in ways that destroyed the nation's most important historic sites. The Village's homes, shops, and industries served this growing desire for spaces with historic "character" without a racially diverse public.

Preserving the Past After World War II

In his brief history of the historic preservation movement, Michael Wallace describes how the post-World War II era was one in which economic progress undermined many preservation efforts. The preservation movement is a useful place to

begin a discussion of representations of the past after World War II because it explains, in part, the way in which popular views of architecture associated with the past changed between 1946 and 1967.

Wallace links the federal government's support of such diverse efforts as urban renewal, suburban development, and highway construction to the destruction historic environments.¹⁵³ Although the Historic American Buildings Survey, initiated in 1935 as part of the New Deal, had documented and photographed the nation's historic landscape, by 1966, fully one half of the 12,000 properties staff recorded had been destroyed.¹⁵⁴ In 1947, the year of Ford's death, genealogical societies, professional historians, architects, archeologists, engineers, civic planners, and a large number of National Park Service and Colonial Williamsburg employees organized the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings. This group, with the help of funding provided by the Mellon family, created plans for a National Trust that would serve as a public relations organization that encouraged preservation. Congress was convinced and in 1949 the National Trust was founded. Throughout the 1950s, the National Trust worked to acquire some historic properties, but with a base drawn primarily from the upper classes, they met only limited success.¹⁵⁵

The preservation movement broadened in the 1960s when intellectuals and activists, particularly in New York City, linked urban renewal to the deterioration of the city's street-life. Jane Jacobs' 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, for example, argued that places like Greenwich Village, where an intellectual and social life

¹⁵³ Michael Wallace, "Reflections on the History of Historic Preservation," 173.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 173-174.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., "Reflections," 173.

thrived due to the personal interactions and discussions encouraged by street life, were declining. The construction of massive skyscrapers and interstate highways encouraged citizens to lead more private lives. Despite very different perspectives, Herbert Gans, Edward Hall, and Ada Louise Huxtable encouraged discussion about the public meaning of the built past.¹⁵⁶ Suburban life and urban renewal were identified as erosive sources for American's personal and social identities.¹⁵⁷

Anxieties about the Cold War also fueled the interest in preserving and understanding America's past. National Trust leaders argued, Wallace explains, that if the destruction of our historic landscapes continued, we would face "a future in which America" might find itself, "without roots, without a sense of identity, and with nothing to lose."¹⁵⁸ Wallace contends that such concerns about linking personal to national identity are similarly reflected in Jackie Kennedy's passionate restoration of the White House, which was celebrated with a series of television tours. As the 1960s came to a close, preservationists pointed to inner-city rioting in Harlem (1964), Watts (1965) and finally Detroit (1967) as confirmation that the destruction of the past was creating a tumultuous and uncertain present.¹⁵⁹

In 1966, preservationists achieved their greatest legislative success with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act. The Act created an Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, instituted a National Register of Historic Places, generated a list of National Historic Landmarks, and formed posts for State Historic Preservation Officers. Norman Tyler writes that "until that time, preservation activities focused on

¹⁵⁶ Hayden, 3-4.

¹⁵⁷ Wallace, "Reflections," 175.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

established landmarks. Local historical organizations were interested in the restoration and maintenance only of structures with great significance.”¹⁶⁰ After the Act was passed, Tyler notes, “historic preservation became an integral part of society, expanding interest and involvement at a level never previously imagined.”¹⁶¹ The 1966 Act established an approach to preservation aimed at keeping everyday architecture of the past alive in the present.

In Detroit, the preservation movement was unable to save many of the city’s historic structures; urban renewal and white flight ensured that much of the built past was destroyed. Jerry Herron writes that the city, “more than any other spot in this country—has been so thoroughly humiliated by history, so emptied of the content, both material and human, that used to make this place *mean*.”¹⁶² However, at the Village, Ford’s preserved buildings, homes, and machine shops offered a sense of history offered an escape into an ordered past, one that implicitly supported a racial hierarchy with whites at the top.

From Village Green to Main Street U.S.A.: Ford and Disney in Dialogue

Although Henry Ford and Walt Disney became national icons through distinct business enterprises and were born thirty-eight years apart, they had much in common. Ford and Disney shared a suspicion of intellectuals, big government, and labor unions. They also used the technology boom of early twentieth century to their benefit. Ford and

¹⁶⁰ Tyler, 46.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶² Jerry Herron, *AfterCulture: Detroit and the Humiliation of History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 14.

Disney simultaneously decried and celebrated the nation's shift from a production to a consumption culture. And they created landscapes of leisure that reflected these paradoxical worldviews.¹⁶³

Disney's desire to create a clean, family friendly theme park in Anaheim exemplifies how popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s reflected the changing demographics of America's urban public landscapes. Throughout the late-nineteenth and into the early-twentieth century, various landscapes were shaped by and reflected not only racism towards African Americans, but also xenophobia, particularly as immigration from Eastern Europe increased. By the time the country entered the Great Depression, and after World War II, however, the massive migration of African Americans from southern states to northern urban centers and white flight became more central in shaping the urban and rapidly growing suburban landscapes. Spaces of leisure similarly reflected this changing demography. While Disneyland was consciously designed as an alternative to existing public places, an escape from the noir and racially mixed urban landscape of Los Angeles in nearby Anaheim, the Village *became* such a place.

Like the Village, Disneyland would include an "historic" downtown. Disney's streetscape, which, like Ford's Village, excluded the more disreputable businesses often associated with even small town centers—the bar and the gambling house—presented a Main Street laden with nostalgia and innocence. It also exemplifies Disney's goal of

¹⁶³ Watts writes that Ford's "Five-Dollar Day also stemmed from a populist strain that colored his thinking throughout adulthood. His career as an automaker had been marked by a loyalty to working people and suspicion of financial power," 183. In his analysis of Walt Disney, Watts writes that Disney embraced a "populist cultural politics." Steven Watts, "Walt Disney: Art and Politics in the American Century," *Journal of American History* 100, no. 2 (1995): 84-110.

creating an alternative to the public spaces that were available for families (see Figure 2.1).

Eric Avila argues that Disney's distrust of urban public spaces and specifically the amusement park was symptomatic of the simultaneous anxiety and fascination with mass media and the explosion of popular culture that typified modern life.¹⁶⁴ At the turn-of-the-century, places like Coney Island encouraged and reflected the nation's transition from a culture of production to a culture of consumption. Scholars like John Kasson have explained how the growth of the amusement park was emblematic of a broader cultural shift. Victorian era values, celebrated by the Anglo-Saxon elite, including delayed gratification, thrift, and sobriety were replaced with a consumerist paradigm which celebrated indulgence and personal fulfillment. The culture of consumption offered the working class, immigrants, women, and other marginalized groups opportunities to enjoy and explore a new culture and value system. The amusement park's freedom, however, was also anxiety producing, even for those who enjoyed its pleasures.¹⁶⁵

Walt Disney grew up middle-class in Marceline, Missouri and Kansas City. Although he certainly enjoyed the new technologies that were changing the local landscape such as the movie house, he was also aware of its perceived dangers. Like Henry Ford, Disney was fascinated by the possibilities that new technologies and mass production offered, but he was concerned that as the landscape associated with small-town life disappeared in favor of larger urban centers, so would the value system it encouraged.

¹⁶⁴ Avila, 113.

¹⁶⁵ John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).



Figure 2.1: Greenfield Village Country Fair of Yesteryear parade down Main Street, May, 1961. The Country Fair of Yesteryear was clearly an invented tradition, but one to which visitors flocked. Box 101, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

Avila points to the ways in which Disney was not alone in his discomfort with mass culture. The Disney family moved to Kansas City just the industrial revolution began to move the town into modernity. When movie houses, dance halls, and amusement parks arrived in the booming city, officials took a variety of measures to address and monitor what they called “the problem of leisure.”¹⁶⁶ In 1910, the Kansas City Recreation Department was placed under the Board of Public Welfare, which also oversaw the Social Services Department, the Parole Board and the City Correctional Farm. This decision, Avila suggests, demonstrates the ways in which officials viewed commercial amusements in “pathological terms.”¹⁶⁷ It was in this cultural environment that Disney came of age and as the young animator boarded a train for Los Angeles in 1923.

In Los Angeles, Avila notes, Disney found himself among other mid-westerners who were nostalgic for small-town life. During this period, as Mickey Mouse rapidly became a popular cultural icon, Disney adopted a populist cultural politics that in many ways mirrored Ford’s. He felt a “common bond with the great majority of American small town and country folk, their taste and ideals.”¹⁶⁸ During the 1930s, Disney’s appreciation of the “American common man,” like Ford’s, reflected a general enthusiasm for the American folk that flourished among New Deal politics, illustrators, and some intellectual circles.¹⁶⁹

This celebration of the “common man” would find a physical expression on the landscape through Disneyland. Avila writes that:

¹⁶⁶ Avila, 113.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁶⁸ As qtd. in Avila, 117.

¹⁶⁹ Avila, 114.

His preoccupation with the settings that nurtured traditional folk values reflected a deeper conviction that human values and behavior were conditioned by their surroundings, and that proper surroundings cultivated proper values and behavior. That conviction not only dictated the placement of Disneyland in Orange County, but also guided the ordering of space inside the park and determined the park's thematic emphasis on small-town America, the "wild" frontier, and the suburban family home.¹⁷⁰

Avila argues that the landscape also "encapsulated the values built into the design of postwar suburban communities" and that it "anticipated the burgeoning political culture of suburban whiteness" that developed in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁷¹ Disneyland, Avila argues, extolled the "virtues of consumerism, patriarchy, patriotism and small-town Midwestern whiteness," effectively issuing a "retreat from the public culture of New Deal liberalism" and asserting a "privatized, suburban alternative to that culture."¹⁷²

Karal Ann Marling comes to similar conclusions noting that Disneyland's Main Street U.S.A. equated the business of "Main Street U.S.A. with the very historical fiber of the nation." She continues that:

At the gateway to the cold war moralism of Walt Disney's reconstructed America, Main Street U.S.A. celebrates the real-life pleasures of exuberant postwar consumerism. A Williamsburg or a Greenfield Village adapted to the social climate of the 1950s, Main Street U.S.A. affirms that the good life—utopia—is American, middle-class, and Midwestern. The rest of Disneyland, to which the thoroughfare leads, represents a world view grounded in Main Street's values.¹⁷³

But Greenfield Village *was* in many ways adapted to the social climate of the 1950s, offering a similar experience to its visitors that also sent implicit messages about race.

Disney built Disneyland in Anaheim because of the relative inexpensive land, and he bargained that the completion of the Interstate Highway System would bring millions

¹⁷⁰ Avila, 113.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁷³ Marling, 200.

of visitors living on the outskirts of the city to his theme park with ease. But the park's location also led to an alternative use. Robert Findlay explains that Disneyland's location led to its use as a central commercial district by the metro-area's suburban residents:

The nation's original magic kingdom helped to transform Anaheim, a small and subordinate town on the fringes of Los Angeles, into the equivalent of a central business district for urbanizing Orange County. In large part because of Disneyland's presence, Anaheim acquired such assets as a major convention center and hotel-motel complex, and a big-league stadium that attracted both professional baseball and professional football teams. These facilities made Anaheim the leading "downtown" in Orange County and thus helped to bring cohesion to its seemingly disorganized sprawl.¹⁷⁴

The theme park became an alternative downtown for a suburban landscape without an obvious center.

Disneyland also benefited from increasing mythological and actual links between the city and a culture that encouraged challenges to established racial, gender, and class boundaries. In 1943, the same year that Detroit was enveloped in a race riot, downtown Los Angeles became a center of ethnic conflict during the Zoot Suit riots. During World War II, downtown Los Angeles was populated by poor whites and people of color looking for work in the defense industry. Young Mexican American men enjoyed the new spaces of popular culture that defined this urban area such as dance halls and bars. And they also participated in this culture by wearing zoot suits. After a scuffle between servicemen and young Mexican American men resulted in the injury of a marine, servicemen descended upon the city attacking anyone wearing a zoot suit. The riot was one of the worst in the city's history and supported the image of the city as a space of violence and racial conflict. After the war, whites purchased homes in the suburbs both

¹⁷⁴ Robert Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 54.

because they were affordable and because they sought to escape a racially diverse landscape.¹⁷⁵

Los Angeles was not the only city landscape redefined through white flight. In Detroit, the decline of public space in downtown commercial districts was linked, at least in part, to white flight and racism. In many northern cities, public parks, amusement parks, and dance halls reflected the diverse population. Throughout World War II and after, African Americans traveled to Detroit knowing that Jim Crow laws were not as ingrained in the fabric of city-life, even if racism was. Public transportation, parks, amusement areas, and historic sites were not segregated. As blacks began to participate not only in the economy of northern cities, but to frequent public places, many whites moved out of the city, abandoning not only their residences, but also sites of leisure.

The success of both Ford and Disney's nostalgic representations of the past are suggestive of the ways in which established public spaces located near or in cities—such as Coney Island and Central Park for example—were increasingly associated with people of color and danger by white communities. Thomas Sugrue has argued convincingly that white flight from Detroit residences did not begin after 1967's race riots, but well before.¹⁷⁶ The following section outlines how this early white flight accounts, at least in part, for the Village's growing popularity after World War II. Greenfield Village functioned not only as a representation of the past, but also an alternative town center as the metro-area landscape began to reflect the racial diversity and racial tensions of the city.

¹⁷⁵ Eduardo Obregon Paragon, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suit, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2006), 15-16 and 177-178.

¹⁷⁶ Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Race, Public Places, and Downtown Detroit

In 1943, the same year of the Zoot Suit Riots, Detroit's public park Belle Isle became the center of racial conflict on a hot Sunday afternoon. Detroit swelled with a rapidly increasing population as southern whites and blacks flocked to find work in the city's wartime industries. Racial tensions grew as the city faced a housing shortage of mammoth proportions. In 1942 *Life* magazine reported on Detroit's importance as a center of wartime production, but that racial tensions left many wondering whether Detroit would blow up Hitler, or the United States.¹⁷⁷ In the summer of 1943, it appeared that the latter was true as the city was enveloped in violence. The 1943 Detroit race riot began at Belle Isle and its origins in a public space exemplifies the ways in which racial conflict in the city would mark and shape the landscape during last half of the twentieth century.¹⁷⁸

Belle Isle

Belle Isle—an island park in the Detroit River connected to the mainland by Jefferson Avenue Bridge—was designed by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1883. At the end of the nineteenth century, Olmsted and those who identified themselves as members of the “City Beautiful” movement had high hopes for the ability of public places to have a civilizing affect on America's diverse city populaces. Olmsted and others believed that places like Belle Isle would encourage the development of a democratic public culture, where people of different classes and ethnicities would intermingle and find common

¹⁷⁷ “Detroit is Dynamite,” *Life*, August 12, 1942.

¹⁷⁸ Reynolds Farley, Sheldon Danziger, and Harry J. Holzer, *Detroit Divided* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), 35.

ground. Since opening, the park had flourished. Leisure activities available in the park included ball fields, beaches, boardwalks, hiking trails, a canoe livery, playgrounds, and picnic areas.

Between 1930 and 1950, Detroit's African American population increased from 120,066 to 300,506.¹⁷⁹ Changes in the southern labor market such as the introduction of cotton picking machinery and a new reliance on chemical herbicides, along with the growth of wartime jobs in the 1940s, led many African Americans to journey north looking for jobs.¹⁸⁰ African Americans arriving in Detroit encountered an ethnically diverse population. Of its residents, 81,383 were migrants from Canada, 59,343 were Polish, 29,908 were Italian, 26,102 were English and Welsh, and 21,976 were Russian.¹⁸¹ Although ethnic heritage and identity remained important, these disparate ethnic groups were increasingly united by political and class interests. Still, race remained a great divider. The racism that continued to shape life in Detroit was palpable as the city swelled with a new population of African Americans searching for work.

On June 14th 1943 fifty black teenagers and zoot suiters tried to gain entrance to Eastwood Park, one of Detroit's privately owned amusement parks. Zoot suits were often worn by young people of color and featured high-waisted, wide-legged, tight-cuffed pegged trousers and a long coat with wide lapels and wide padded shoulders. The suit became synonymous with rebellion, particularly as wartime shortages added political meaning to young people's decisions to purchase and wear the suits. The War Production Board viewed the suits as extravagant and symbolic of defiance.

¹⁷⁹ Sugrue, 23.

¹⁸⁰ Farley, 12.

¹⁸¹ Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 13.

Soon the teenagers and zoot suiters were surrounded and attacked by almost 200 white high school students and servicemen. When police arrived they rounded up the black Detroiters and ejected them from the park. Dominic J. Capeci and Martha Wilkerson explain that it was this action that, in part, ignited the fight on Belle Isle six days later.¹⁸² On June 20th, almost one hundred thousand Detroiters were gathered in the city's largest public park. Eighty percent of those at the park were black and people were tightly packed in the park's 985 acres. Around 3:30 in the afternoon, Belle Isle became the site of numerous brawls and fights between young blacks and whites. By nightfall, the conflict spilled onto Jefferson Avenue Bridge. Rumors began circulating in the east side black community that a group of whites had killed a black woman and her young child by throwing them off of the bridge.¹⁸³ By 11:30, 5,000 Detroiters populated the area, and by now, most of them were white. Sailors, bridge crossers, and residents shouted things like "We don't want any niggers on Belle Isle."¹⁸⁴ Police officers soon arrived and over the next two and a half hours, they took control. African Americans at the scene said that officers quelled the conflict by "beating and arresting Negroes while using mere persuasion on whites."¹⁸⁵ Black Americans retaliated by looting white-owned stores in Paradise Valley. By 4 A.M., the Detroit police told Mayor Jeffries that they would be unable to contain the spreading violence. Jeffries then asked the governor to send in the Michigan State Troops.¹⁸⁶ Defense plants continued to operate, and as black workers rode

¹⁸² Dominic J. Capeci, Jr. and Martha Wilkerson, *Layered Violence: The Detroit Rioters of 1943* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 5.

¹⁸³ Herbert J. Rushton, William E. Dowling, Oscar Olander, and John H. Witherspoon, *Factual Report of the Governor's Committee to Investigate the Riot Occurring in Detroit on June 21, 1943*, 11 Aug. 1943, Part I, 7-8.

¹⁸⁴ As qtd. in Capeci, 6.

¹⁸⁵ Capeci, 6.

¹⁸⁶ Farley, 35.

streetcars through white neighborhoods and whites drove through black neighborhoods to get to work, opportunities for racial violence enveloped the metro-area landscape. Finally, President Roosevelt moved federal troops to Detroit. Military police and infantry regiments used tear gas to disperse the gangs of rioters and marched toward residents with their bayonets drawn.¹⁸⁷ In the end, 34 people were killed, 25 of whom were black; 765 suffered serious injuries, and 1,893 were arrested. The city suffered an estimated \$2 million in property damage as a result of vandalism, looting, and fires, and Detroit's international reputation was damaged¹⁸⁸ In Germany and Japan, broadcasters condemned the United States, asserting that the riots were evidence of the nation's "abusive social situation."¹⁸⁹

After the riots, Detroiters asked what had gone wrong. A fact-finding committee appointed by the governor located blame in the black community. Their report suggested that black southern migrants were prone to use violence.¹⁹⁰ The city's African American leadership, they argued, had failed to control newcomers and had encouraged the riots by pushing migrants to demand social justice.¹⁹¹ The city's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) chapter and many civic officials, however, disagreed. The NAACP's investigation, led by Thurgood Marshall, future Supreme Court Justice, argued that continuing discrimination and racist practices in defense factories, the lack of adequate and appropriate housing for blacks, and police brutality, had contributed

¹⁸⁷ Farley, 35.

¹⁸⁸ Capeci, 18.

¹⁸⁹ *Detroit News*, June 24, 1943, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Rushton, 2-15.

¹⁹¹ Farley, 36.

to the riot.¹⁹² The police department consisted of 3,400 men, only 43 of whom were black. Further, of the 25 blacks who died in the riot, 17 were killed by the police. Others blamed young blacks and whites. Many suggested that although these young men could find work in Detroit, the city lacked a wide range of recreational facilities.¹⁹³ The riots encouraged many whites to abandon both recreational spaces downtown and their residences. They would flee to the surrounding suburbs and work hard to keep black Americans out of them by refusing to support housing projects that might have attracted black Americans and public pronouncements of racism.

Bois Banc Island, Bob-Lo, and Other Sites of Recreation

Another example of the ways in which the city's leisure landscape reflected growing racial tensions occurred shortly after World War II in 1946. Bois Banc Island was one of the city's most popular recreational sites. Tourists and residents boarded a steamboat at the foot of Woodward Avenue and sailed down the river to Bob-lo Amusement Park. The boat and the park, however, were segregated. One day a week, African Americans were allowed to take the ship to the island amusement park. In 1946 Sara Ray, a young black woman, and twelve of her white schoolmates tried to board the steamboat. Managers enforced their Jim Crow policy and Ray watched her classmates sail away without her. After hearing about the incident, the city's civil rights leaders sued that state pointing to an 1860 statute that prohibited discrimination by common carriers. Bob-lo Amusement Park officials argued that state laws could not apply to crafts

¹⁹² Farley, 36.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

that sailed international waters. The case finally made its way to the Supreme Court, where justices ruled that an 1851 federal court ruling made .discrimination in this case illegal.¹⁹⁴

After the 1943 race riot, public places like Belle Isle and Bob-lo Amusement Park declined as a popular leisure spaces. But they were not the only downtown public place to lose patrons. For example, ballroom dancing and swing dancing venues across the city closed during the 1950s: Eastwood closed in 1952, Edgewater Park burned down in 1954, Jefferson Beach's pavilion became a boat storehouse in 1955, the Graystone sold out in 1957 and the Vanity closed in 1959. The last of the big ballrooms, Walled Lake Casino, presented name bands until the night it closed in September of 1960.¹⁹⁵

Although not located downtown, Bob-lo Island also began a slow but steady decline after World War II. By 1996, the Island closed, but its heyday was over by the late 1970s. Although many whites continued to work downtown, they moved to the suburbs. Consequently, the places where they spent their leisure time were also shifting.

¹⁹⁶

Between the late 1940s and 1960, Detroit's demographics shifted dramatically and racial tensions became central in shaping the city landscape. In 1940, black Americans constituted 9.2% of Detroit's total population; by 1960, 28.9% of the city's 1.6 million residents were black.¹⁹⁷ African Americans and whites poured into the city during and after World War II, but housing construction could not keep pace with the

¹⁹⁴ Farley, 37.

¹⁹⁵ Patricia Zaccharias, "When Detroit Danced to the Big Bands," *The Detroit News*, February 25, 2007, <http://info.detnews.com/history/story/index.cfm?id=6&category=life>.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Sugrue, 23.

burgeoning population. Thomas Sugrue details the ways in which homeowners and institutions maintained racial barriers that perpetuated the social, economic, and political marginalization of African Americans in the city.¹⁹⁸ Although Thurgood Marshall successfully argued before the Supreme Court that the enforcement of racial covenants in housing were unconstitutional in *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948, whites continued to use other methods of maintaining segregation in the Detroit metro-area. Sugrue argues that the housing shortage and segregation ensured that black residents were confined to “densely packed, rundown, and overpriced housing.” Consequently, “living conditions in the center city, never good, deteriorated rapidly.”¹⁹⁹

Urban development played a large role in exacerbating white flight from the city by making the commute to downtown Detroit easier. Beginning in the late 1940s, Sugrue notes, parts of the city with some of the densest black populations were devastated by highway construction.²⁰⁰ The Oakland-Hastings (later renamed Chrysler) Freeway destroyed the black Lower East Side, Paradise Valley, and the Hastings street business district, which was comprised of jazz clubs and important civic institutions.²⁰¹ Equally devastating to downtown’s black housing and commercial districts were the construction of the John C. Lodge and Edsel Ford Freeways.²⁰² By 1950, 423 residences, 109 businesses, 22 manufacturing plants, and 93 vacant lots had been condemned along the first three-mile stretch of the Lodge freeway. In 1958, the freeway had displaced 2,222

¹⁹⁸ Sugrue, 36.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 47.

buildings.²⁰³ The construction of Edsel Ford Expressway led to the removal of approximately 2,800 buildings. The freeway became the preferred method of travel for white motorists commuting to the city-center. Consequently, the city's public transportation, often viewed as essential for public urban spaces to flourish, was neglected. The city's streetcar service officially ended in 1956 when the city sold 184 streetcars to Mexico City for 1 million dollars.²⁰⁴

Still, African Americans made political gains during this period. In 1957 William Patrick became the first black City Council member. Two years later, the Detroit police integrated patrol cars. In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. led 125,000 people in a march down Woodward Avenue. And just two years before the city's worst race riot, Dr. Charles Wright, an obstetrician and gynecologist, opened part of his West Grand Boulevard office as the International Afro-American Museum. The museum contained numerous items connecting black Americans to their African roots.²⁰⁵

The city's population, however, slowly declined as many white residents, not only in Detroit but across the nation, fled urban centers for the suburbs. When the city's population dipped to 1.6 million in 1960, planning commission member Charles Roemer claimed that the loss would be temporary. "The gloss of the suburbs will wear off," he said.²⁰⁶ While many Americans fled to the suburbs because they offered the working and middle-class an opportunity to own property, often, white Americans found suburban communities attractive because they did not welcome blacks. In Dearborn, where Ford

²⁰³ Sugrue, 47-48.

²⁰⁴ Peter Gavrilovich and Bill McGraw, eds. *The Detroit Almanac: 300 Years of Life in the Motor City* (Detroit: The Detroit Free Press, 2000), 49.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

had built the Rouge Factory and the Village, Mayor Orville Hubbard pledged to keep the city “clean” and implicitly, white.

Orville Hubbard: Constructing a Landscape of Racism

While downtown Detroit was losing white residents, Dearborn was one of the many surrounding suburbs gaining them. In 1920, 3,500 residents populated the area that surrounded the Rouge Factory and the Museum and Village complex. By 1942, over 63,000 people lived there. That same year, Dearborn elected Orville Hubbard mayor. He remained mayor until his death in 1977 and during that time, heavily shaped Dearborn’s reputation as one of Detroit’s most openly racist suburban communities. Hubbard’s tenure as mayor and his policies demonstrate that the Village’s image likely also changed as African Americans were slowly but surely informed that their presence in Dearborn was unwelcome.²⁰⁷

Six months after the race riots, in October of 1944, Homer Beadle appeared before the city council on behalf of a homeowners’ group.²⁰⁸ Beadle, a member of the Dearborn Board of Education, explained that his group was concerned about current plans for a federal housing project in Southwest Dearborn. Rumors were circulating that the government was planning to create another Sojourner Truth Housing project: a place where black Americans could find affordable housing.²⁰⁹ Two weeks after Beadle appeared before the council, Hubbard and four of his councilmen traveled to Washington

²⁰⁷ David L. Good, *Orvie: The Dictator of Dearborn: The Rise and Reign of Orville L. Hubbard* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 36.

²⁰⁸ Good, 140. See also Sugrue, 76-77.

²⁰⁹ Good, 140.

D.C. to lodge an official complaint with the Federal Public Housing Authority (FPHA).²¹⁰ Hubbard also called a special council meeting to alleviate the public outcry and concern from Dearborn residents that soon followed Beadle's appearance. At the meeting, Hubbard delivered a message to the council that made explicit the racist undertones of the community's concerns:

They placed the Sojourner Truth project in a white neighborhood in Detroit only three years ago, despite the protests of Mayor Jeffries and the Detroit Housing Commission. Bad riots followed. We don't want anything like that to happen in Dearborn. The home owners in Dearborn face economic losses, and they are bitterly protesting. It is my opinion that the ordering of such a project would have serious repercussions in Dearborn and in the Ford plant where racial relations are now harmonious.²¹¹

Hubbard's statement brimmed with racism and threatened violence. After Hubbard delivered his statement, the council adopted a resolution in which they argued that the federal government was abusing its power during a war-time emergency, thus demonstrating that Hubbard was not alone in his views. Hubbard and attorney John Fish then made a second trip to Washington D.C., where they presented their resolution and appealed to FPHA employee George Shermer. In November, Shermer reminded Hubbard and Dearborn residents that the project had not yet received final approval. However, he did note that a survey indicated that 12,000 black war workers were commuting each day to the Rouge and Dearborn plants. Such a commute would be unnecessary if blacks could find housing closer to the plants. In May of 1945, the FPHA began clearing land, while residents led by Hubbard continued to protest. Luckily for Hubbard and his supporters, the labor shortages and emergencies created by World War

²¹⁰ Good, 141.

²¹¹ As qtd. in Good, 141.

It soon ended; on September 2, 1945, Japan surrendered. Shortly afterwards, the FPHA closed the book on its plans for Dearborn. More lasting was that the stand against the housing project established that the majority of Dearborn residents and their mayor would actively work against efforts to draw African Americans residents.

In 1948, the reaction of Hubbard and the residents of Dearborn to another proposed housing project clarified the way in which issues of race weighed heavily on the minds of community members. The John Hancock Life Insurance Company proposed the construction of a \$25-million, multiple family housing development. Springwells Park Development would contain 1,200 units for families and 600 duplexes. Ford Motor Company and Ford Foundation owned the 930 acres of the land intended for the development. Developers advertised the housing as “a model town within a town” and the City Planning Commission readily approved the request for a zoning change from business to residential use.²¹²

Hubbard, however, quickly announced his opposition to Springwells. His campaign against the project demonstrated the power of racism to sway the minds of Dearborn residents. Hubbard explained that the “model town” would be anything but. Apartments and duplexes, he argued, attracted the “wrong kind of people.”²¹³ At a city council meeting, Hubbard claimed that 95% of Dearbornites supported his position because they realized that the residents of Springwells would “change the whole complexion of the population.” “They would change it,” he continued, “because they would be renters, not having a real stake in the community.”²¹⁴ Although Hubbard’s

²¹² Good, 157.

²¹³ As qtd. in Good, 157.

²¹⁴ As qtd. in Good, 157.

claims seem grounded in prejudices based on class, at a later meeting, Hubbard made explicit his concerns that the development would bring African American residents to the city. He read a telegram sent to him by William R. Hood, a recording secretary of the UAW-CIO Local 600 and an African American. Hood wrote:

We are desirous of information as to whether or not these badly needed homes would give any relief to the colored population. We hope that in the preliminary discussion and in the final determination that people of all races will be taken under consideration.²¹⁵

Hubbard claimed that the telegram was evidence that the development would lead to a “race problem.” Despite Hubbard’s claims that Dearbornites were in agreement with his concerns, however, a poll conducted by the *Dearborn Press* found that 75% were in favor of Springwells. Still, Hubbard refused to relent and mounted a campaign to change the minds of locals.²¹⁶

Hubbard called a special council meeting, and attacked Henry Ford II, who supported the project, saying, “It’s nice to know the young fellow is thinking of Dearborn... It’s too bad, though, he doesn’t think enough of it to live here, where he makes his money, instead of on the Gold Coast in Grosse Pointe Shores.”²¹⁷ Although it would have no legal standing, both Hubbard and his opponents agreed that a vote on the issue would decide whether or not John Hancock would proceed with its plans. Before the vote took place, Hubbard and his lieutenants engaged in what biographer David L. Good describes as “arguably the most blatantly racist performance of his entire career and perhaps the one that best demonstrates his ability to influence events in Dearborn.”²¹⁸

²¹⁵ As qtd. in Good, 157.

²¹⁶ Good, 157.

²¹⁷ As qtd. in Good, 157.

²¹⁸ Good, 159.

Hubbard sent city department heads and their aides, along with some Civil Service employees, to distribute fliers across the city. One said “KEEP NEGROES OUT OF DEARBORN/ Vote *NO* on (Advisory Vote)/ PROTECT YOUR HOME and MINE!”²¹⁹ Another leaflet explained that none of the approximately 1,500 Negroes who worked at the Rouge lived in Dearborn and that Hancock would have to rent apartments to them. In the end, Hubbard’s tactics worked: 15,948 voted against the project and 10,562 voted for it.²²⁰ The City Council agreed that they would not grant the rezoning request and Henry Ford II canceled the land contract with Hancock. The vote also demonstrated the power of Hubbard to harness racist sentiment among voters. Although many voted for the Hancock apartment center, Hubbard was able to change the minds of many Dearborn residents through the racist fears that led to white flight during much of the pre and post-war eras. Further, regardless of whether many of Dearborn’s residents were not moved by such arguments, the image of the city as popularized in the press ensured that African American metro-area residents linked the specter of Hubbard to the space of Dearborn.

One of the most public discussions concerning Hubbard’s racism and the racism of many Dearborn residents occurred in March of 1964, three years before Detroit was embroiled in a second and far more devastating racial riot. Giuseppe Stanzione was born in Sicily to an American mother and in 1958 he claimed his American citizenship and immigrated to Dearborn. When he arrived, he began working in construction. Eventually, he started his own business and by 1961 he owned a car, a dump truck, a pickup truck, and a cement mixer. Stanzione also developed a habit of parking these vehicles in an abandoned lot next to his house. Several times, neighbors called the police and

²¹⁹ Good, 160.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

complained. Stanzione had other habits that his neighbors found annoying. He lived with a woman he was not married to, enjoyed having loud parties, and had a tendency to, when provoked, stand on his porch and announce that he was going to sell his home to “the niggers” and move to California. Consequently, the neighbors were alarmed on September 2, 1963 when they watched two men and a pregnant woman, all of whom were black, moving furniture into Stanzione’s house.²²¹

Stanzione claimed that upon returning home that over the next 29 hours he was trapped as 400 people pelted rocks, bottles, eggs, and vegetables at the house. At one point, he said, he was assaulted with a bed rail. Even worse, Stanzione maintained, was that when the police arrived, they refused to arrest anyone or to demand that the crowd disperse. Everything, Stanzione argued, was ordered by Orville Hubbard to make an example of “what happens to a white person who tries to sell a home in Dearborn to Negroes.”²²² As it turned out, the African Americans seen at the house were movers; Stanzione had rented the upstairs portion of his home to another family.²²³

At a City Council meeting shortly afterwards, three local clergymen who witnessed the event announced their shock at the lack of police action. Hubbard responded that they should stick to preaching instead of “trying to revolutionize” the community. But the *Dearborn Guide* published an article about the events and within a week Detroit papers had picked up the piece. When Ben Cate, a reporter from *Time* magazine heard about the story and tried to follow up on it, he was rushed out of city hall. Cate said he would press charges and Hubbard responded by saying that “If *Time*

²²¹ Good, 296.

²²² *Ibid.*, 297.

²²³ “Hubbard Sued for \$250,000: Homeowner Hits Mayor in Mob Act,” March 15, 1964, *The Detroit Free Press*.

magazine wants any facts, let it subscribe to the local paper.” Hubbard said that the media had exploited the race issue and that “it would be no problem at all” if the papers “would play those stories back in the classified section where they belong.”²²⁴

In March of 1964, Stanzione’s attorney Ellsworth K. Hanlon filed a complaint in Federal District Court, charging that Stanzione had been denied privileges and immunities of a citizen, equal protection, and due process of law under the Fourteenth Amendment. In response, Hubbard submitted an affidavit maintaining he was innocent because he did not hear about the Kendall Street incident, as it had become known, until the following day. Hubbard said that he “never issued an order, directly or indirectly, formally or informally, or by implication, to treat any person or class of persons differently by reason of their race, color, creed or national origin, nor has such order ever been conveyed by innuendo or otherwise.” He went on to say that he had never conspired or discussed with anyone “as to the treatment and protection to be afforded members of minority groups or persons dealing with minority groups.” Finally, he said that he had “never conspired discussed or otherwise communicated with any person... as to techniques, schemes, or plans to prevent or discourage sales, leases or rentals of Dearborn property to members of minority groups.” City police officers confirmed Hubbard’s story, stating that they had never received an order from the mayor regarding Stanzione. The case finally came to trial in June of 1965. Judge Wade H. McCree presided and George E. Woods served as Hubbard’s lawyer. The jury consisted of five

²²⁴ Good, 297. See also, Don Lenhausen, “Negro on Jury as Trial of Hubbard, Aides Opens,” *The Detroit Free Press*, June 1, 1965.

men and seven women and included one black man, Lewis McGhee, a Detroit resident who worked on a Chrysler assembly line.²²⁵

As the case progressed, it became clear to the prosecution that they would have to make a strong case that Hubbard was a deeply committed racist and segregationist. This, Merrill argued, would be proof of Hubbard's motive and intent in the case. Merrill called William T. Johnson Jr. to the stand. Johnson was an Alabama reporter who in 1956 published an interview he conducted with Hubbard. In it, Johnson quoted Hubbard as saying "I am for complete segregation, one million per cent on all levels." Later, Hubbard explained that blacks could not "get in" to Dearborn. "Every time we hear of a Negro moving in," he explained, "for instance, we had one last year—we respond quicker than you do to a fire."²²⁶

As the case drew to a close and Stanzione and others took the stand, Merrill attempted to introduce literature from Hubbard's 1961 mayoral campaign which claimed that, "persons and problems who would lower property values," would be kept out of Dearborn. Merrill also wanted to present the jury with literature which admitted that while Camp Dearborn, the city's public park, was "37 hours away from Africa and 37 minutes from Belle Isle, who wants to go to either place?" The judge refused arguing that authorship of the literature had never been established.²²⁷

The jury began deliberations on the morning of June 23rd. After lunch, McCree reminded the jury that their task was to disregard racial matters, which Merrill later argued damaged the government's case. When the jury returned they found in favor of

²²⁵ Good, 299.

²²⁶ Ibid., 308.

²²⁷ Ibid., 309.

Hubbard.²²⁸ Hubbard embraced McGhee and said “It must have been hard for you. The pressure I mean.” McGhee responded by saying that “this was a time for honesty. Not race. Just honesty.” Later, McGhee was asked whether he had ever encountered any racism in Dearborn. McGhee said, “I always go through without stopping.”²²⁹

The racist policies and behavior of Hubbard and Dearbornites during this period establish firmly the city’s links to the politics of white flight. How blacks perceived the Village given its location in Dearborn is difficult to ascertain given that Visitor Surveys conducted during this period did not ask respondents to identify their race. As a site review of the Village demonstrates, black Americans were visiting the site in 1953, at the beginning of the civil rights movement and in the midst of Hubbard’s tenure as mayor. If they did not perceive the Village as a racist institution, they were at least aware of the difficulties they may encounter in trying to get there; they would have to, unlike McGhee, go through the city and stop. Further, the historical messages about race communicated at the Village were representative of periods in which blacks were disenfranchised politically and socially either through enslavement or Jim Crow laws. A discussion of the Village, its operations, and its narratives about race in America demonstrates the ways in which the Village may have functioned as an alternative town center, one that may have simultaneously confirmed traditional racial hierarchies for whites, and challenged them in the minds of black Americans.

²²⁸ “Mayor of Dearborn is Acquitted on Rights Conspiracy Charge,” *The Washington Post*, June 25, 1965, <http://www.proquest.com>.

²²⁹ Good, 311. See also “Hubbard Found Not Guilty: Excused Hubbard Juror Mocked Government Case,” June 25, 1965, *The Detroit Free Press*.

A New Town Center: The Village (1948-1967)

After Ford's death in 1947, the Village landscape was complete. It continued to operate, and to attract more visitors, and its interpretive messages remained relatively static. The principal narratives surrounded the Village's most prominent areas: Menlo Park, the Ford birthplace and the Bagley Shop, the Wright Brothers Home and Cycle Shop, the Village Green, and the Craft Area. These places continued to focus on historical narratives that celebrated the common man, hard work, and invention. The interpretive material provided to visitors at each of these structures emphasized American progress. How patrons responded to this information, however, may have been mixed. Ford Motor Company jobs began to decline as early as 1945. Between 1945 and 1954 the Ford Rouge plant jobs fell from 85,000 to 54,000.²³⁰ By 1960, the plant employed 30,000.²³¹ Automation heralded the beginning of the end of the auto-industry. How patrons interpreted the site during this period, then, likely shifted between an acceptance and celebration of American progress and a nostalgia for what was or what might have been. Further the racial conflict that enveloped the metro-area landscape during this period indicates that white flight and racism shaped the Village's meaning and function.

The administrative disarray at the Village after Ford's death lent itself well to the imposition of a narrative on the site, one constructed by and for visitors. A discussion of the broader shifts in administration is followed by an analysis of several site reviews conducted by public historians from Colonial Williamsburg. Museum professionals asked to review the Village found the task difficult. The standards and approaches used at Colonial Williamsburg were not those used at the Village. The disjuncture that site

²³⁰ Gavrilovich, 161.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

reviewers from Colonial Williamsburg felt, however, may not have been the experience of visitors. Although visitors certainly complained about aspects of the Village, as a review of visitor surveys will show, patrons continued to arrive at higher rates. The popularity of buildings on the Village Green and the institution of festivals and other events associated with nostalgic understandings of small town life demonstrate that the Village operated as an alternative public space to Detroit's downtown for tourists and residents of the metro-area.

Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s administrators attempted to impose standard business practices at the Village and to more clearly define and articulate the site's educational mission and goals. Because the Village was in such flux, it was more readily shaped by the needs and desires of patrons than administrative policies or alterations to the site's interpretation of the past. A review of how site administrators worked to redefine the Village's purpose and meaning after Ford's death through changes to its infrastructure and external reviews demonstrates how visitors could easily impose their own narrative on their encounters with the pastiche of American history represented at the Village.

Immediately following Ford's death, Clara Ford received the title of president. Each week, Clara visited the Village and according to Hayward S. Ablewhite, who was finally appointed director in 1949, was "very disturbed if she thought you had any ideas of changing anything that she would think contrary to what Mr. Ford's ideas were."²³² While Clara ensured that Ford's vision was upheld, Ray Dahlinger managed the daily maintenance and operations of the Village. Dahlinger served as Supervisor of

²³² As qtd. in Upward 124.

Construction and Grounds in 1934 and continued to play an important role until 1950. Another key player in Village operations was Evangeline Dahlinger, whom many believed Ford's longtime lover. She taught etiquette and horsemanship to students at the Village schools. According to one source, she also influenced Ford's selection of buildings and chose the furnishings included in the Village buildings.²³³ Clara Ford's weekly visits and the Dahlingers' unofficial, but very real power over the Village were emblematic of Ford's refusal to adhere to conventional business practices.

In 1950, however, the haphazard and unorganized operation of the Village began to end. The institute's first organizational chart was drafted and Emil A. Ulbrich was appointed general manager of the Edison Institute. Public relations, curatorial, schools, controller, and maintenance and security personnel reported to Ulbrich beginning in November. That year, 500,000 visited the Village.²³⁴ Although administrators had improved communication methods and day-to-day operations, they continued to develop new programs that would simultaneously attract more visitors and add educational value to the experience. In 1950, Vernon Dameron, recently appointed director of the newly established Department of Education, released a report entitled, "Plans and Progress."²³⁵ Dameron began by noting that "Many well-informed individuals claim that the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village are unmatched anywhere in the world in variety, number, and quality of facilities and resources."²³⁶ However, he contended, "the component problems which combine to relegate the Village and Museum to an

²³³ Bryan, 95.

²³⁴ Upward, 124.

²³⁵ Vernon Dameron, "Plans and Progress," Box 1, Accession #140, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 1.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

insignificant role in the field of education can be resolved, essentially, into the paradoxical situation of an *educational institution without an educational program*.²³⁷

Dameron explained his perspective when he discussed visits by elementary school children:

Hundreds of thousands of school children from elementary thru (sic) high-school, and a less impressive but very substantial number of students representing every field of specialization in institutions of higher education, have “visited” the Village and Museum. Only rarely, however, have school visits been actually considered an integral part of formal academic work. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to state that the vast majority of visits by educational groups have been made with very little if any thought to correlating or integrating the resultant experiences with the every-day work of the school.²³⁸

Dameron encapsulates how the Village was perhaps operating as a “museum” in name only. Establishing departments, like the Education Department, and defining the museum’s educational goals would be the administration’s project throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1951, A.K. Mills was appointed executive director of the museum and village (at that time referred to collectively as the Edison Institute). It was the first time that a clear line of authority was drawn between employees and a director, both on paper and in practice. Mills died one year later, but it under his leadership a serious contemplation of the Village’s educational mission and representation of the past began. Soon after his appointment, Mills asked Allston Boyer, Assistant to the President of Colonial Williamsburg to review the Village, the Village School, and the adjacent Henry Ford Museum; this section focuses primarily on Boyer’s comments on the Village. During World War II and in the post-war era Colonial Williamsburg became the unofficial model

²³⁷ Dameron, 2. Italics are Dameron’s.

²³⁸ Ibid., 3.

for outdoor museums. Boyer's description and analysis of his tour of the site provides a unique assessment of the Village's strengths and limits. It also reveals *something* of what the visitor experienced during 1951. Boyer's criticism of the Village and its failure to meet professional standards of an American history museum—cohesive, coherent, consistent—suggests that the Village's popularity was due to much more than its ability to communicate historical information to its visitors, which, according to Boyer, it was doing very badly.

Boyer began his analysis of the Village by explaining that it lacked a “clear definition of what they are and what they are trying to accomplish.”²³⁹ He continued, a “great many words have been written” about the Village, but none are adequate.²⁴⁰ In fact, Boyer argued that the lack of definition had created “confusion in the minds of almost every person” to whom he spoke with about both Greenfield Village and the Henry Ford Museum. Boyer then attempted to define the Village:

What is it then? What should the Village be presented as? After wrestling with the problem for many hours, I think the answer is this. The Village can be presented as a museum, a living memorial to Mr. Ford, his friendships, his admiration for great men like Edison, the Wrights, Burbank, Stephen Foster, the influences in his life, his birthplace, his school, his first factory, watches and machines, his faith in Americanism and Religion. Greenfield Village is the tangible evidence of Mr. Ford's interests. It breathes with his spirit. Its heart is his heart. Presented as something else it is unreal and always will be.²⁴¹

Boyer suggested that Village administrators admit that the site made little sense in a linear historical framework because it was based on one man's “historical” interests and

²³⁹ Allston Boyer, “Curriculum Report,” Box 1, Accession #88, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 1.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

inspirations. In doing so, the Village could present itself more accurately as Ford's version of the American past.

Boyer made a series of recommendations to alter the site's mission, definition, and operation. He pointed out that the Village, despite its popularity, was not meeting its financial goals, for example. The Village's primary problem, Boyer explained, is that the employees were from a much older generation: "You can never balance your budget if you have throughout your organization a state of mind which accepts the cleaning of an eight-and-one-half acre room with 36-inch brooms pushed slowly by old gentlemen" he says. Further, the Village's limited season—it closed between November 1 and April 14—posed a serious problem. Even if the Village represented the past, administrators must, Boyer argued, adopt more modern and mechanical maintenance methods. He went on to offer more specific recommendations regarding maintenance, accounting, and keeping better accounting records.

Two more suggestions from Boyer came under the heading "Asset Control" and "Promotion." Both Greenfield Village and the Henry Ford Museum were in need of a list of their collections and to capitalize on more modern methods of marketing and advertising. Boyer suggested adding a large sign at the entrance and on the road. Boyer also recommended revising the folders, guidebooks, and other paper promotional materials available to visitors. Boyer even recommended adding a Model T Ford to Greenfield Village that would do everything but move and let children operate it. This idea was put to use, but not until the 21st century arrived.

Boyer also made several recommendations concerning the operation of the guide service at the Village. He explained that guides should be posted at the following list of locations, which he understood were “the most popular with the public.”²⁴²

Cotswold Cottage Group—buildings transported from England
Menlo Park Exhibit—focuses on the story of Thomas Edison
Sir John Bennett Store—an English jewelry store
General Store—a working nineteenth century general store
Carding Mill
Stephen Foster Birthplace—the home of the famous songwriter
Abraham Lincoln courthouse
Clinton Inn
Tintype Shop
Glassblowing Shop
Gristmill
Cooper Shop
The Church

Boyer suggests that all other buildings be closed and that signs be posted outside instead.²⁴³ He goes on to suggest that it might be desirable to make the interiors of these structures visible from the outside. Further, one way of generating income might be to have staff live in some of the houses in the residential section.

The buildings that Boyer identified as “popular” were located on the Village Green—the section of the Village that looks like a turn-of-the century Main Street—and the Crafts Area, which looks like an English Village. In these areas, patrons engaged with representations of the past and participated in activities that were certainly a part of 1950s everyday life. They could eat, peruse the items in the stores, and commingle with other patrons, a majority of which were fellow Detroiters.

²⁴² Boyer, 9.

²⁴³ Ibid., 10.

In 1951, the Village instituted several special one or two-day festivals that emphasized various aspects of American history. These events also reflected the site's dual function as historic site and contemporary public space. The "Country Fair of Yesteryear" became one of the site's most popular and historically inaccurate events. In 1951, the celebration consisted of children who attended the Village School rolling hoops and dancing around a Maypole while the Suwanee steamship was used as the backdrop for an old fashioned minstrel show (see Figure 2.2).²⁴⁴ Interpreters took over the next year when the Village School closed. The "Country Fair" became a yearly celebration until 1980.

The tone of this event, loosely based on historical facts, highlights the ways in which the Village began to function as an alternative downtown in which white suburbanites could escape the racial turmoil that enveloped the metro-area landscape. The minstrel show perhaps best embodies the Village's participation in the celebration of a past in which racial hierarchies were more clearly established. The past became a tool for providing patrons with a community where cultural, economic, and social values were rooted in traditional hierarchies.

Throughout the 1950s, the Village instituted a wealth of special events whose titles suggest that they too supported nostalgic visions of America's past. These events also demonstrate the site's celebration of consumption. In 1951 the Village began to host the Old Car Festival, which drew the largest single-day crowd in the site's history with 14,611 visitors. Four years later, administrators initiated the annual Muzzle Loaders'

²⁴⁴ Upward, 132.



Figure 2.2: Minstrel show at the “Country Fair of Yesteryear” special event in 1952. In the background on the stage are performers in blackface. Box 101, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

Festival. And in 1960 the Village hosted the first Midwest Antiques Forum. These special events focused on celebrating America's material past. They simultaneously promoted a respect and nostalgia for the past and contemporary values of consumption.²⁴⁵

In August of 1952, Holmes Brown wrote another site review of the Village. Brown was also a member of the Colonial Williamsburg staff. Unlike Boyer's review, Brown's analysis of the Village is much more favorable. Brown also bases his discussion on a "regular tour" of the Village. Brown's comments provide insight into what a tour may have been like, although clearly, visitors would experience the tour with different goals and worldviews. Brown begins by writing that there were several points during the tour when his "spine tingled."²⁴⁶ He found, for example, Stephen Foster's home particularly moving. "Tears came to my eyes," he wrote. Brown also admitted, however, that at other buildings he was "bored stiff," and that "at the end" he was "exhausted physically and mentally," which supports Boyer's assertion that the site is simply too large to see in one day.

Brown reviewed the site's reception of visitors, merchandizing programs, and each building on the Village Tour. While on the tour, Brown noted that the Martha-Mary Chapel was confusing; this building reminded him "that it's hard to tell what is an authentic building and what is not."²⁴⁷ To alleviate this problem, Brown suggested that the "background color of the descriptive sign be the same color for all authentic structures."²⁴⁸ Brown's comment supports the notion that visitors to the Village may

²⁴⁵ Upward, 132 and 141.

²⁴⁶ Holmes Brown, "Greenfield Village—Ford Museum Tour," Box 1, Accession #88, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 88.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

have chosen to ignore the historical educational components of the Village. It was, after all, a place where one could engage in most of the activities provided in a “real” downtown. There were restaurants, stores where merchandise was sold, and a Village Green where patrons could sit and eat their own lunch. The architecture and the experiences offered to patrons encouraged a multi-layered interpretation of the site. Visitors could experience the Village both as historic educational site and as a “downtown.”

Brown also visited the slave cabins and the George Washington Carver Memorial which he refers to collectively as the “Negro Homes.” He writes that this was “a fine treatment and inspirational.” He goes on to compare the Village to Colonial Williamsburg:

Incidentally in less than five minutes at Greenfield Village, I saw more adult Negroes visiting the exhibits than in two and one-half years at Williamsburg. They know they are welcome. This is a real tribute to your management.²⁴⁹

Brown suggested that black Americans knew they were welcome in the Village. But Brown was white and comparing the experience at the Village to a museum located in Virginia, where racism had a longer history. By 1952, southern blacks were beginning their most successful assault on Jim Crow. Certainly, the site’s inclusion of buildings associated with African American life may have encouraged many black Americans to come to the Village. But even if blacks and whites did commingle at the Village, racist whites would have been comforted by the historical messages that the Village sent about race. The Village’s representations of black life could be read as progressive only because they were included. However, the site’s two slave cabins (which visitors could

²⁴⁹ Brown, 5.

not walk inside), a “replica” of George Washington Carver’s slave cabin, and a tenant-farmer’s home (also closed), in many ways supported a traditional racial hierarchy. These buildings did not represent a long history of African Americans fighting the white power structure. Instead, black American history was firmly entrenched in a paternalistic narrative. In a Village Tour from 1966, the guide is provided with cursory information to communicate:

Mattox House: The white frame house was overseer’s house built before the Civil War on a plantation near Ways, Georgia. Following the war, it was the home of Negro farmers. It is named Mattox House for the last family that lived there.

Carver Memorial: Henry Ford had this cabin built here in the Village (1941-42), to honor the distinguished Negro scientist, George Washington Carver, a man he knew and admired. It is similar to the cabin in which Carver was born in Missouri, a slave. Dr. Carver developed hundreds of products from the peanut and sweet potato and did much to improve farming methods and consequently the economy of our southern states.

Slave Quarters: We see the back of 2 tiny buildings which were once part of a group of 52 that made up the slave quarters on a plantation (Hermitage Plantation), near Savannah, Georgia. Most of the buildings were brick because clay for brick²⁵⁰

After this brief discussion of the Mattox House, Carver Memorial, and Slave Quarters, patrons are then taken inside of the Logan County Courthouse, where in the course of a two page recommended talk, the Emancipation Proclamation is never mentioned, and the Civil War is mentioned only once when the Tour suggests that the guide explain that, “The photograph on top of the case is a copy of the last picture taken of Mr. Lincoln. It was made April 10, the day after Lees’ surrender at Appomattox and just four days before

²⁵⁰ “Village Tour: 1966,” Box 13, Accession #88, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 38-39.

the assassination.”²⁵¹ The treatment of African American history at the site, then, might have been viewed through a variety of lenses. In some ways, it was progressive. Black buildings of the past were on the landscape of a museum; they were worth remembering and discussing. An alternative reading of these structures, however, indicates that the depictions of the black past at this site supported a traditional racial hierarchy. Black Americans remained in their appropriate place at the Village. They were not fighting for higher-wages or Civil Rights. Further, in the text provided for tour guides, the only individual black person discussed was George Washington Carver, and then only briefly. Patrons learned nothing about the life of the enslaved or of tenant farmers. In many ways, these structures reflected Ford’s paternalism. But Ford’s public image among black residents of the metro-area was complicated. It is more likely, then, that African Americans decisions to visit or not visit the Village were more rooted in their views of Dearborn and Mayor Hubbard than their views of Ford.

Statistics concerning the number of black patrons at the Village are unavailable for this period, but a review of special events photos sheds some light on the percentage of visitors who were black Americans. Special events photos are particularly useful because they so often feature visitors engaged in site activities. In a review of 76 crowd shots taken at special events between 1948 and 1967, only 25 African American patrons all of whom were obviously either in elementary or high school appeared (see Figure 2.3). This suggests that these patrons were likely attending the Village as part of a school group rather than on a visit with their families.

²⁵¹ “The Village Tour: 1966.”



Figure 2.3: A photo of children at the “Country Fair of Yesteryear” in 1965, one of the few photos in which African Americans appear. Box 101, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

Although such data is qualitative rather than quantitative, it seems to confirm that African Americans were not a significant part of Village attendees.²⁵²

Brown also points out that given Ford's death the Village should now become not only a monument to Edison, but to Ford. He argues that the Ford birthplace should be open and that "the garage housing the First Ford should be made the climax of the trip."²⁵³ By the time he left the Village, Brown said, he had a "pretty good picture of what Tom Edison was like," but that he knew "literally nothing of the personality, ambitions, successes and failures of Henry Ford."²⁵⁴

One year later, the Edison Institute Museum became the Henry Ford Museum.²⁵⁵ Perhaps responding at least in part to Brown's suggestions, Ford's memory became more central to the site's depiction of the past after his death. By 1953, the Ford Homestead was ready to open to the public (see Figure 2.4).²⁵⁶ Visitors could now walk through the home where Mary Ford raised her children and view the domestic space that provided Ford with an upbringing that led to financial success and celebrity. The living room and dining room were central features. A copy of a 1966 Village Tour is emblematic of the tours that visitors received between 1953 and into the 1970s. A discussion of the interpretation of the Ford homestead is indicative of the ways in which guides presented patrons with a layered history.

²⁵² "Special Events: Country Fair 1951-1966," Box 3, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford. "Special Events: Let Freedom Ring, 1964, 1966, 1968-69," Box 5 Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford. "Special Events: Turkey Shoot, 1955, 1956-57," Box 6 Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

²⁵³ Brown, 7.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁵⁵ Upward, 124.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 124.



Figure 2.4: The original Ford family farm and home ca. 1910. The home was disassembled and then restored on the Village landscape. Box 44, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

The script suggests that guides begin by pointing out that the Ford farmhouse was built in 1860 and is reminiscent of other “Midwestern farmhouses” that “one still sees in America today.”²⁵⁷ The guide is then directed to explain that the farmhouse was restored in 1944, three years before Ford’s death.²⁵⁸ The narrative at the Ford home, then, is a meta-narrative of historical information and more contemporary facts: the guide explains the history of the building, and its history in the Village. In this way, the Village becomes a “real” place.

The guide then adds yet another layer of history to the information that patrons receive when they ask visitors to “step back into the past,” as they enter the home and view two bedrooms on the left and a Sunday parlor on their right. The script notes that “the Sunday Parlor was a very special room in the 19th c. American home—both in town and country. It was used only on Sundays, holidays and very special occasions... The rest of the time the curtains were drawn and the doors closed. The family used the Everyday Parlor. Come in and join me there!”²⁵⁹ The narrative at the Ford birthplace is three-fold, then, when the site is placed in the context of the “American home.”

Once in the Everyday Parlor, the script asks guides to explain that “Ford restored his boyhood home in memory of his mother who he said “made home a nice place to be”—a sentiment, incidentally, warmly shared by his father and brothers and sisters.”²⁶⁰ The Everyday Parlor is depicted as a monument to Ford’s mother, the ideal domestic partner. Unsurprisingly, Ford’s success is linked to a utopic vision of the nuclear family.

²⁵⁷ “Village Tour: 1966,” Box 13, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 4.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

Guides were then asked to lead patrons into the dining room to tell visitors that at the back of the home was “Mary Ford’s spacious and spotless kitchen.”²⁶¹ At this point in the tour, attention turned to Ford’s early interest in tinkering with inventions. The guide explains that “Somewhat to the dismay of his father, young Henry was always more interested in the machinery on the farm than in farming itself.”²⁶² Such a narrative comported with the by then well-established myth of Henry Ford. Beyond this narrative, however, the multiplicity of histories conveyed on the tour communicate the ways in which the Ford Homestead, like other structures at the Village were functioning collectively both as an historic and as a leisure landscape firmly rooted in the present.

In 1954, A.K. Mills died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack. Donald A. Shelley was appointed executive director. Shelley would work hard to add educational components to the museum and Village, but his primary interest was in decorative arts. Shelley would encourage associations with antiquers and their interests and serve as executive director until 1976.

That year also marked the Edison Institute’s 25th Anniversary. Special activities including the dedication of the Heinz House were conducted to celebrate the anniversary. The H. J. Heinz House came from Sharpsburg, Pennsylvania, and served as the Heinz family home for 15 years before it became the first Heinz factory. The firm had donated the house to Greenfield Village and by the summer of 1954 it was ready to open to the public.²⁶³

²⁶¹ “The Village Tour: 1966,” 4.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶³ Upward, 134.

Throughout the 1950s, dozens of Village buildings, particularly the historic, homes were refurbished. Rooms previously closed to the public were opened after being painted and decorated with more authentic objects. Noah Webster's house, for example, had been used as a building for students attending the Village schools.²⁶⁴ But as school attendance declined, it was refurbished and opened to the general public.

During the 1950s Village administrators also began televising the site as part of its promotional activities. On April 18, 1955 the National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) "Today" show televised three live color programs from the site. Afterwards, the Village began broadcasting its own show, "Window to the Past" from WTVS, Detroit's educational station.²⁶⁵ The show was brief—only 15 minutes long—and depicted life in 1855. Students from the Village school demonstrated how American education had changed over 100 years. In October, the "Today" show returned. The same day, the "Howdy Doody Show" aired a segment from the Scotch Settlement School.²⁶⁶

By the mid 1960s, the Village had established itself as an important historic site in the Detroit metro-area. In 1964, Michigan Governor George Romney spoke at the "Let Freedom Ring" July 4th celebration. Men dressed in Revolutionary garb as Romney discussed the importance of the nation's history. Patrons were encouraged to contemplate the events of 1776, while simultaneously enjoying a communal experience with their family, friends, and other Americans. During this event, like so many others, the Village functioned in multiple ways as the past and present came together. The Village was operating as a museum and a contemporary public space. Just three years

²⁶⁴ Upward, 142.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 139.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 139.

later, the city would be enveloped in a race riot that would solidify downtown's reputation as a dangerous and racially conflicted public space and further encourage alternative public spaces to develop in the metro-area's burgeoning suburbs.

From Belle Isle to “Belcatraz”: the 1967 Riots and the Racialization of Public Space

On July 23, 1967, Detroit was in the midst of a heat wave. That night, Detroit police officers decided to raid an illegal after-hours saloon on Twelfth Street. The saloon was located in the center of one of the city's largest black neighborhoods. Such a raid was common, often ending peacefully as the police dispersed the crowd and arrested a few patrons and the owners of the establishment. That night, however, police took a bolder stance and detained eighty-five drunk, angry, and hot customers outside until reinforcements could arrive.²⁶⁷

As the police officers waited, a crowd of almost two hundred people gathered to witness the activities. Comprised primarily of black residents, the crowd grew angry eventually throwing bottles, beer cans, and rocks at the police. The police were engaged in yet another example of white police brutality against black residents. By 8:00 A.M., over 3,000 people were gathered on Twelfth Street. During the course of five days, forty-three people were killed, 7,231 men and women were arrested, 2,509 buildings were burned, and \$36 million in insured property was lost. The riot was quelled when the National Guard and federal troops arrived to support local law enforcement.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Sidney Fine, *Violence in the Model City: The Cavanaugh Administration, Race Relations, and the Detroit Riot of 1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 159.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

Orville Hubbard initially dismissed the riots claiming that the burning looting and rioting was a great opportunity for “instant urban renewal.”²⁶⁹ But on July 24, when touring the riot area with two department heads and a reporter, the mayor spent three hours maneuvering around barricades, fire-fighting equipment, and African Americans on 12th street before saying “Let’s get the hell out of here.”²⁷⁰ Surprisingly, Hubbard expressed sympathy for the honest African American citizens “who are obviously being hurt by this situation more than anyone else.”²⁷¹ A few days later, however, Hubbard announced a curfew for Dearborn and created a task force of Dearborn police who were ordered to shoot looters and arsonists on sight.²⁷²

By July 27th, Detroit’s prison system was unable to handle the continual arrests. After a meeting between Governor Romney and city, county, and court officials, the city’s corporation counsel suggested that the women’s bathhouse on Belle Isle might serve as an alternative detention center.²⁷³ Police Department and the Department of Street Railways modified the structure and approximately 500 prisoners were moved there on July 29.²⁷⁴ Olmsted’s park was nicknamed “Belcatraz” where “every cell” was a “shower bath.”²⁷⁵ The park was used as a detention facility until August 13.²⁷⁶ The bath house would never be used for its intended purpose again; in the mid-1970s, it was razed.²⁷⁷

²⁶⁹ Good, 320.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 320.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 320.

²⁷² Ibid., 320.

²⁷³ Fine, 261.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 261.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 261.

²⁷⁶ Fine, 261.

²⁷⁷ Michael Rodriguez and Thomas Featherstone, *Detroit’s Belle Isle: Island Park Gem*, (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 91.

A week after the rioting ended, Orville Hubbard made a statement that in many ways reflects the murky divisions between race and class, and the distinct division between the suburbs and downtown. At the city council meeting Hubbard said:

Such things wouldn't have happened here. I would put a curfew into immediate effect and shoot any looters or troublemakers on sight. This is war. When you have mad dogs running around, brute force is needed. Rabble-rousers such as Dr. King and Stokely Carmichael have been firing them up. H. Rap Brown says, 'If America doesn't come around, we'll burn it down.' It's amazing what a few people can do.²⁷⁸

Hubbard then said, however, that not all African Americans living downtown were involved, "some were looting, but you don't indict a whole people for it."²⁷⁹ His comments that not all African Americans were involved and his initial sympathy for African American business owners suggested that he differentiated between middle-class and impoverished black Americans. They also reflect a growing sense that riots and mass conflict could not occur in places like Dearborn because these were problems that occurred only in urban spaces.

The bath house conversion, from public space to detention center, embodies the social, economic, and cultural shift that had taken place in downtown's public landscape. The public landscape, like the rest of the city's infrastructure, had declined. Like the black residents of Detroit, Belle Isle and other public spaces were casualties of an unstable economy, poor decision making on the part of city officials, and white flight. At this moment, downtown became forever marked a space of crime, violence, and black residency. Whites would continue to leave the city for the suburbs, and here, create their

²⁷⁸ Good, 320.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 320.

own spaces of leisure, or, in the case of the Village, continue to mark pre-existing ones as their own.

Scholars disagree on the nature and outcome of the 1967 riot. Most recently, Sidney Fine, novelist Barbara Tinker, and John Hartigan Jr. have suggested that the riot was not one of racial upheaval, but an uprising, at times an interracial one that expressed anger at class rather than racial divisions. Hartigan writes that the key difference between the 1943 riot and the 1967 “is the shift in the latter upheaval from community-based and directed racial violence to class warfare against property and its defenders, the police and firemen.”²⁸⁰ He continues:

whether the local character of the riot of 1967 consists primarily of class or racial elements is not as important as the realization that the significance and constitution of race shifted in the interval between these two conflicts...Racialness of the residents did not thereby evaporate, but its significance was reprioritized along a continuum of concerns that stressed class distinctions.²⁸¹

For others, like Heather Ann Thompson, the 1967 riot and the 164 other eruptions that occurred in 128 cities that same year, should not be read as the death knell for America’s inner city.²⁸² This perspective, she explains, “ignores the fact that, just as the catastrophic Great Depression generated new political options for how America might be ordered, the polarizing urban rebellions of the 1960s generated new political possibilities for America’s inner cities.”²⁸³ The riot may have created political possibilities for inner cities and African Americans in particular. Regardless, it marked downtown, for many

²⁸⁰ John Hartigan Jr. *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 63.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁸² Thompson, 47.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 47.

suburban whites living in the surrounding metro-area, and for many Americans nationally, as a space of violence, danger, and, regardless of truth, racial conflict.

Throughout the post-war era, the Village was shaped by and reflected national and local cultural dialogues about the city, the suburb, and race. The Village is, as reviewers from Colonial Williamsburg suggested, in many ways a blueprint for the “wrong” way to construct a history museum. America’s history is represented as a pastiche of buildings, shops, and homes built in time periods ranging from the 17th century to the twentieth. The buildings were transported to the Village from the north, the mid-West, the south, and perhaps most oddly, England. Because the Village is in many ways timeless and placeless, however, it is easily viewed and used by patrons in a variety of ways; its meanings and functions are multitudinous. Between 1947 and 1967 the Village was a museum, a monument to Ford and Edison, a nostalgic representation of the nation on the cusp of the industrial revolution, and a celebration of America’s seemingly unstoppable march of progress. The Village Green and Crafts shops areas could be easily experienced as a commercial center with all of the benefits that historic architecture hypothetically encouraged: a sense of community and democracy. Perhaps most importantly, the Village became an alternative to downtown’s racially mixed and conflicted public spaces, one that supported a traditional race hierarchy.

CHAPTER THREE

Backlashes: The Visitor and the Village in Dialogue (1968-1979)

It looks as though Dearborn's chickens have come home to roost. Throughout most of its 40-year history, Dearborn has stood as an almost impregnable fortress of white racism. It has earned a national reputation as a haven for those Americans who prefer to take an ostrich-like attitude toward society's problems rather than try to work them out. It is a symbol of all that is contrary to our Judaic-Christian heritage and our Constitution.²⁸⁴

Editorial in *The Michigan Chronicle*, 1969

In March of 1969, a strike by 325 of Dearborn's public works employees led Mayor Orville Hubbard and the city council to change their employment policy. For the first time in decades, city officials announced that they would hire non-residents. Every applicant, including African Americans, would be considered. The *Michigan Chronicle* encouraged the black community to refuse the city council's invitation. An editorialist wrote angrily that, "the front doors that have been slammed in their [African American's] faces have conveyed the message that they aren't wanted." "Now" the piece continued, "they aren't going to jump at the chance to slip in via the garbage collection route." Dearborn had developed a racist reputation among many black metro-area residents during Hubbard's tenure. The political practices that angered African Americans, however, did not faze Dearborn's white residents who continued to re-elect Hubbard.²⁸⁵

In the twelve years following the Detroit riot of 1967, Village administrators worked to increase patronage and expand their administration. Special programs designed to attract more visitors were instituted, a perimeter railroad and carousel were added, and several new positions were added. During these years the Village hosted events

²⁸⁴ "Blacks Must Say No to Orville Hubbard," *The Michigan Chronicle*, March 15, 1969, Sect. B.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

celebrating the nation's birthday and its own. And it continued to thrive in terms of the number of yearly visitors. During the Bicentennial, the Village reported a record breaking 1,751,126 visitors.²⁸⁶

This chapter considers how broader shifts in higher education, the growth of living history museums and the preservation movement, and the racial conflict and economic decline in the Detroit-metro area contributed to the Village's popularity and shaped how visitors encountered the landscape as a political space during the late sixties and 1970s. The Village likely continued to be used as an alternative public space to downtown, particularly as white flight increased. The site's representation of the past, however, which celebrated the self-made man, the middle- and working-class and racial and ethnic hierarchies, embodied the political and cultural values consistent with the growth of what Lisa McGirr has identified as "populist conservatism."²⁸⁷ White blue-collar and middle-class workers who felt abandoned by their unions subsequently left the Democratic Party. The political values that shaped the conservative backlash of the 1980s were largely supported by the Village landscape. Of course complex negotiations between administrators, guides, visitors, etc. continued during this time. In 1968, for example, the administration received several letters requesting that the site open the

²⁸⁶ Upward 177.

²⁸⁷ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 187. The title of McGirr's fifth chapter is "The Birth of Populist Conservatism," which she argues culminated in the election of Ronald Reagan as governor of California in 1966. McGirr writes that Reagan effectively reached not only to Republican voters, but also "rank-and-file union voters" by presenting himself as a "friend of the working man." Reagan, she argues, despite his close ties to anti-union forces, "was able to convey a more populist image" (201). Affluent, "homeowning, white blue-collar workers could be courted on issues of rising taxes and spending," which were even more effective when, "they were racially coded" (201). This chapter argues for a similar reading of Michigan's white population who were the primary visitors of the Village and began to cast their political votes for Republican candidates at increasing rates during the late 1960s. Ford's populist worldview, as reflected on the Village landscape, comported with the conservative politics of this period.

Hermitage Slave Huts for viewing, and the site agreed to do so upon special request. In general, however, the representation of the past at the site supported race and class hierarchies that placed whites and the middle-class at the top. As Americans engaged in a cultural battle surrounding issues of class, race, and gender, for some, the Village landscape provided an escape in which to cling to traditional, and at times contradictory, ideologies.

The Academy and the Historic Landscape (1968-1979)

During the late 1960s, the Village continued to be shaped by a shifting political and cultural climate. Detroit's 1967 riot was followed by a series of devastating blows to the civil rights and anti-war movements. In 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated and civil rights leaders went into a period of reassessment. The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 provided limited gains. For many, political equality failed to provide a solution to racism. Movement organizers and activists turned their attention to the problems created by cultural beliefs and ideologies concerning race. Black Americans would succeed, many argued, when they gained political, economic, and cultural power.

Members of social movements located disparities in a wide range of institutions, including universities and colleges. Women and people of color argued that college students were receiving a "consensus" education, one that focused on the accomplishments and achievements of white men. As participants in social movements received Ph.D.s and entered the academy, they worked from within to add new

departments with new curricula. In 1970, San Diego University opened the first Women's Studies Department. Soon afterwards, colleges and universities throughout the nation and abroad would begin to add not only Women's Studies Departments, but also African American History and Studies Departments, Native American and Indian Studies Departments and programs, and Chicano Studies Departments and programs. In his introduction to *The New American History* (1997), Eric Foner explains how the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s changed the historical discipline. These movements:

shattered the 'consensus' vision that had dominated historical writing—and influenced by new methods borrowed from other disciplines, American historians redefined the very nature of historical study. The rise of the 'new histories,' the emphasis on the experience of ordinary Americans, the impact of quantification and cultural analysis, the eclipse of conventional and political and intellectual history—these trends are now... widely known.²⁸⁸

During the 1970s, academics inspired by the ideals of participatory democracy also turned their attention to the nation's historic landscape. Many joined the staffs of museums and historic sites. Academics sought to redefine what counted as "historic" by broadening that definition. They encouraged the representation and preservation of material culture and landscapes associated with the lives of women and people of color. Further, they looked to non-traditional methods and materials, such as living history and objects used in everyday life, for representing that past. By the time the Village celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1979, the women and men who came of age in the 1960s found themselves in positions of power in public history institutions.

²⁸⁸ Eric Foner, *The New American History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), ix. The book was initially published in 1990. This quotation is from the introduction to the First Edition. In the preface to the Revised and Expanded Edition, Foner notes that the 1990s witnessed a period when the "teaching of history unexpectedly emerged as the subject of intense public debate... Previously uncontroversial historical anniversaries became occasions for heated debate." Foner describes the controversies associated with the celebration of Columbus's quincentenary voyage to the New World and the Enola Gay exhibit at the National Air and Space Museum in 1995. These debates will be further explored in Chapter Four.

This shift is perhaps best represented by two events. The first occurred in 1977 when Colonial Williamsburg's Curriculum Committee recommended a new didactic orientation for the museum.²⁸⁹ Unlike the messages of cold war patriotism that shaped Colonial Williamsburg's interpretive messages during the 1940s and into the 1960s, the new interpretive program would be explicitly "democratic" and "egalitarian."²⁹⁰ The new administration, comprised of several social historians, reflected changes in academia. Rather than focusing on how individuals came to support the American cause, they would, as Richard Handler and Eric Gable explain:

[show] that economic self-interest had motivated Virginia's colonial elites to choose revolution...Told in this way, the story would teach the public how people in particular historical and cultural circumstances rationalized their world; by analyzing rather than celebrating past choices, the museum would help visitors to be better citizens of the modern world... The museum as laboratory, then, would teach social scientific analysis rather than ideology.²⁹¹

Included in Colonial Williamsburg's radical changes to their interpretive script were additional discussions of the new consumer society, of the poor, of family life and family structure, and of the lives of the African American population in Colonial Williamsburg.²⁹² Although Handler and Gable point out the limitations of this new interpretive script, in particular arguing that social science is also an ideology, this plan was radical for its time.²⁹³

The living history approach used at Colonial Williamsburg grew popular during the 1970s. Warren Leon and Margaret Piatt suggest that living history complemented the

²⁸⁹ Handler and Gable, 66.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 68-69.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 70.

interest in the “American Revolution Bicentennial and the vogue for ‘history from the bottom up.’”²⁹⁴ They note that as municipalities, state governments, and individuals began to copy Williamsburg, Old Sturbridge Village, and Plymouth Plantation, they also copied these institutions’ use of professionally trained staff members, and new social history. The focal points of interpretation at these sites became basic life experiences such as birth, education, work, marriage, death, disease, and the provision of clothing, housing, and material possessions. Like Colonial Williamsburg, sites attempted to use material objects to spark broader discussions about social, economic, and political processes.²⁹⁵

The publication of the first issue of *The Public Historian* in 1978, an academic journal for historians engaged in activities outside of the academy, is also demonstrative of the increasing links between academics and public and private historical sites. The journal was published by the Graduate Program in Public Historical Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. In the first edition of the journal, Editor G. Wesley Johnson Jr. argued that the journal represented a particular ideological perspective about the abilities of historians. In his preface he explained that:

This journal then is dedicated to the proposition that historians are professional people, who possess certain marketable skills, which can be practiced in the governmental, business, education, or general research arenas.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ Warren Leon and Margaret Piatt, “Living-History Museums,” in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 68.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

²⁹⁶ G. Wesley Johnson, Jr. “Editor’s Preface,” *The Public Historian: A Journal of Public History* 1, no. 1 (Santa Barbara: University of California, Santa Barbara, 1978), 8-9.

Johnson's statement reflected, perhaps, the lack of positions available for historians in higher education. He also suggests, however, a flexible and politicized view of the historian, one that emphasizes his or her role as not only observer of the past, but also a participant in the present.

Leon and Piatt argue, however, that the living-historical-farms movement was in fact more influential than academics in shaping the living-history movement during the 1970s and into the 1980s. In fact, Village administrators would add a working farm to the site during the 1980s. Leon and Piatt contend that, while "closer links to academic social history encouraged individual living-history museums to broaden their interpretation of the past, the living-historical-farms movement unintentionally caused the field as a whole to restrict its scope."²⁹⁷ They explain that the working historical farm concept has a long history. In 1945 Herberg Kellar urged Agricultural History Society to build such institutions across the country. During the 1950s Old Sturbridge Village and the Farmers' Museum at Cooperstown began to keep livestock, but it was not until the late 1960s that agricultural historians, museum professionals, and agriculturalists worked through living-history museums to create full-fledged working farms.²⁹⁸ John Schlebecker, curator of agriculture at the Smithsonian Institute, played a key role in making the establishment of working farms both desirable and inevitable. Schlebecker and others argued that working farms were beneficial for several reasons. First, visitors enjoyed interacting with animals and the activities provided by working farms. Further, working farms offered urbanites and suburbanites a sense of rural life that they were missing in lives increasingly controlled and supported by technology. In 1970, the

²⁹⁷ Leon and Piatt, 70.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

impact of Schlebecker's efforts and the broader interest in working farms was symbolized in the conversion of the Freeman family homestead at Old Sturbridge Village into an operating farm. That same year Sturbridge hosted a symposium in Sturbridge on American agriculture, 1790-1840, sponsored by the Agricultural History Society, the Smithsonian Institution, and the United States Department of Agriculture. The symposium solidified the success of the Freeman Farm project, and the published proceedings of the symposium marked the Freeman Farm as a model for others wishing to add working farms to their living history programs.²⁹⁹ That same year, participants in the Sturbridge symposium formed the Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM). The organization held annual meetings, published a *Bulletin*, and offered those interested a forum for exchanging ideas about operating farm museums.³⁰⁰

Leon and Piatt note, however, that while this turn in living-history museums offered new venues for the promotion of agricultural history and interpretation, it also solidified the reindustrialized bias of living-history museums. They contend that while many of the most important agricultural changes occurred after 1940, living-history farms often choose to focus on the period before 1870. They point to John Schlebecker's comment that visitors often prefer "a pioneer period" because the "nostalgia is greater."³⁰¹

Unlike places like Colonial Williamsburg, Village administrators were slower to respond to shifts in the academy. The Village staff continued to be primarily comprised

²⁹⁹ Leon and Piatt, 70-71.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

of employees handpicked by Ford decades earlier. Institutional leaders had long worked at the site, and rarely had professional training. In the 1980s, a new president with academic training would respond to broader shifts in the museum world. Harold K. Skramstad would, among other efforts, add a working farm to the site's narrative. In many ways, the Village already embodied the progressive spirit of the working farm. Ford's labeling of homes, laboratories and businesses of the middle class as historic foreshadowed the ways in which the New History focused on understanding the everyday lives of ordinary Americans. But, like the living-history museums, the Village was shaped by simultaneously progressive and nostalgic impulses. Although its representation was not limited by time period, it fell into other nostalgic traps. The Village's paradoxical representations and interpretations during the late sixties and 1970s is best understood not in the context of living-history museums, however, but through a study of another escalating area of interest in the past: the historic preservation movement. An analysis of the history of this movement and its activities and growth during the late 1960s and 1970s shows that patrons may have used the Village not only as an alternative public space, but also as a historical representation that supported traditional readings of the past, a view that must have been particularly comforting given the social and economic upheaval many white, middle and working-class Americans encountered during the 1970s.

As the social movements of the 1950s and 1960s became movements focused on redefining power relationships and cultural values, many Americans felt threatened. Conservatives (in the broadest sense of the word) seek to preserve a past that is largely celebratory, while liberals argued for preserving a past that was more inclusive, and

represented a past that recognized political, social, and economic injustices. This new division found expression, in part, in the preservation movement.

Every Town a Main Street: The Historic Preservation Movement (1968-1979)

Ford and Rockefeller's outdoor history museums are defined as some of the most significant contributions to the early American preservation movement. But, scholars often describe Ford's museum as predominantly distinct from other preservation efforts. Certainly Ford's methods were distinct; he followed his own impulses and interests in his construction of the Village. The Village, however, sends contradictory messages that are reflective of the impulses that guided preservationists during the 1960s and 1970s. The complexities that shaped the preservation movement, this chapter suggests, illuminate how visitors, particularly white visitors, may have encountered the site. The renewed interest in using historic architecture to fulfill present needs, the links between consumption and the places of the past, and the connections between preservation and racism, can similarly be found at the Village. The successes of the preservation movement and the complexities that motivated its members, then, also explicate the popularity of the Village during this period.

In his history of preservation, Norman Tyler notes that the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 marked the beginning of a renewed and fervent interest in preservation activities. For example, in 1968 the National Trust produced a film about

preservation for distribution.³⁰² That same year, American and Canadian preservationists founded the Association for Preservation Technology (APT), and in 1969, the Historic American Engineering Record was created to document historic engineering structures. During the bicentennial, however, preservationists officially linked their efforts to capitalism. The Tax Reform Act of 1976 encouraged investors historically opposed to the philosophy of preservationists to engage in preservation activities. The Act offered new financial incentives for small business owners and home owners whose property had historic value. Adaptive re-use met the needs of preservationists and small business owners by making preserving historic structures cheaper than building new ones.³⁰³

Michael Wallace also identifies the late 1960s and 1970s as a turning point in preservation. In his analysis, Wallace divides preservationists of this period into three groups. The first, he describes as “urban homesteaders,” who were baby-boom singles or working couples that found the suburbs either too expensive or too “child centered.”³⁰⁴ The second set of preservationists Wallace describes as “white ethnics” determined to save their neighborhoods. They argued that not only historic architecture, but historic communities were worth preserving.³⁰⁵ By forming associations like the National People’s Action and the National Association of Neighborhoods, these preservationists passed such legislation as the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (1975) and the Community Reinvestment Act (1977). That same year, newly elected President Jimmy Carter and his administration responded to these groups by creating the National Commission on

³⁰² Norman Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice* (W.W. Norton: New York, 2000), 51.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁰⁴ Michael Wallace, “Preserving the Past: Historic Preservation in the United States,” *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 190-192.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

Neighborhoods. In stark contrast to the ethos of progress that guided the post-World War II explosion in interstate highways and suburbs, the NCN focused on protecting pre-existing neighborhoods and providing them with the funds needed to rehabilitate them. These neighborhood groups and their values mirrored those of Henry Ford in many ways, and, this chapter suggests, white visitors to the Village. Wallace explains that neighborhood conservationists were at times:

Classic populists, beating off the attempts of speculators, developers, bankers, and state bureaucrats to commodify their neighborhoods. They were strongly committed to the traditional... They often supported microhistory movements and underwrote local museums, oral history programs, community pageants, grass roots bicentennial celebrations, and ethnic revivals... On the other hand, many... were fearful, defensive, parochial, and racist.³⁰⁶

In 1976, preservationists reached out to neighborhood conservationists and argued for a new definition of “historic district.” The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation suggested that working-class rehabilitated homes should be counted as worthy of preservation.³⁰⁷

Many black Americans, however, became openly opposed to the preservation movement during this period. In 1970, the Capitol East Community Organization argued that blacks would have to fight to preserve their neighborhoods from the efforts of historic preservationists. By designating particular areas as historic, preservationists often ensured a subsequent economic boom in the area. Rising property taxes would often push black residents out. Despite the efforts of some preservationists to address the problem, a rift between poor people of color and preservationists developed.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Wallace, 194.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 190-195.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., “Preserving the Past,” 195-197.

On the whole, however, the preservation movement gained momentum during this period through the establishment of federal and state legislation. In 1978, the new strength of preservationists was expressed in a legal victory. In 1968, the Penn Central Railroad announced its plan to build a 2 million square foot office building on top of New York City's Grand Central Station. The city sued, arguing that as an historic landmark, the railroad could not be developed in such a way. Penn Central argued that the city's refusal to let them build on a national landmark that they owned constituted a "taking" of property and that under the Fourteenth Amendment they were owed fair and just compensation. The Supreme Court, however, found in favor of the city 6-3. They argued that Penn Central was receiving a reasonable return on their property and that the law allowed it to transfer the unused development rights on its airspace to another property. Finally, the Court found that a law "providing services, standards, controls, and incentives that will encourage preservation by private owners and users" was constitutional. Chief Justice Brennan explained that to find otherwise would invalidate not only New York's law, but all comparable laws across the nation.³⁰⁹

Another mark of the preservation movement's success, and one that would forever link the goals of capitalism with protecting the past was the establishment of the National Main Street Program in 1980. In 1977 the newly established National Main Street Center launched three pilot projects in Galesburg, Illinois; Hot Springs, South Dakota; and Madison, Indiana.³¹⁰ The goal of the pilot programs was to convince small business owners that they could compete with the larger department and chain stores found in indoor and strip malls. Downtown commercial centers could find new customers

³⁰⁹ Wallace, "Preserving the Past," 197.

³¹⁰ Tyler, 174.

by advertising their stores as part of a unique shopping experience. Administrators at the National Main Street Center worked, as Norman Tyler explains, to show that “preservation can lead to economic development and downtown promotion” and that these efforts could be seen as “inextricably linked to the same goals.”³¹¹ The program was an immediate success. Since its inception, more than 40 statewide, citywide, and countywide Main Street programs have been created; today, there are more than 1,200 active Main Street programs.³¹² With commercial success as their goal, however, Main Street programs inherently emphasize present uses for historic buildings. The pasts of these buildings, particularly if these pasts were painful, are often forgotten. Traumatic, painful histories are often not a draw to customers. The complexity of the Main Street program is also found at the Village.

During the 1970s, then, white visitors may have continued to use the site as an alternative public space. As patrons wandered the Village’s Main Street, they encountered a constructed space, one filled with ironies, inconsistencies, and complexities, but ones which likely confirmed the personal worldviews of many patrons as well. Like preservationists and those who supported downtown revitalization, like neighborhood conservationists, many, particularly returning visitors to Greenfield Village and residents of the surrounding almost entirely white suburbs, were motivated by contradictory impulses: populism, racism, and traditionalism. The celebrities depicted at the Village—Ford, Edison, and George Washington Carver, among others confirmed American myths about capitalism and hard work. They also celebrated the middle class

³¹¹ Tyler, 176.

³¹² “About the National Trust Main Street Center,” *The National Trust Main Street Center*, July 20, 2007 <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=2§ion=1>.

and working class, however, as essential to American progress and success. As Detroit residents were confronted with economic hardship, they may have found the Village narrative particularly comforting and reassuring. As many white males were pushed out of the automobile industry, they may have also found comfort in the celebration of the male inventor, farmer, and craftsmen. The representation of gender at the Village, which supported the notion of traditional gender roles reassured visitors opposed to the challenges second-wave feminism posed to their worldviews. And as many white Americans blamed people of color for their financial struggles, the Village's implied racial hierarchies may have also been a source of comfort.

A Black and White Landscape? The Detroit Metro Area (1968-1979)

Between 1968 and 1979 the Village became part of a metropolitan landscape demarcated and defined along race and class lines. As urban renewal and white flight left the city's historic landscape in decline and decay, it may have been difficult to interpret the Village as a representation of the roots of American progress. Further, as the Village became embedded in a landscape shaped by white flight, its patronage predominantly comprised of white blue collar and middle-class residents of Michigan may have interpreted the site as complimentary of a worldview that grew out of a faith in self-made manhood, democratic capitalism, and subconscious or conscious racism.

After the 1967 riot, national and local politics continued to reflect divisions between white and black residents. In 1968, for example, George Wallace found a strong base of support among Detroit whites during his presidential campaign. Thomas Sugrue

notes that this support was indicative of the racial tensions between black residents and the metro-area white working and middle class. Although his 1968 campaign eventually faltered in Detroit, in 1972, he won the Michigan Democratic primary and swept every predominantly white ward in a city now 45% African American. Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew similarly wooed angry urban and southern white Democrats and also swept predominantly white precincts in 1968 and 1972.³¹³

Sugrue also points to the ways in which local politics reflected racial divisions. In 1969 Roman Gribbs, a conservative Polish American mayoral candidate won a close race with African American opponent Richard Austin. Whites also rallied to support the overwhelmingly white police force including its parliamentary Stop Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets (STRESS) squad, which was routinely accused of using unnecessary brute force against black residents. When *Milliken v. Bradley* called for interdistrict busing to eliminate metropolitan-wide educational segregation, whites rebelled. Sugrue writes that:

As the invisible boundaries within Detroit frayed, whites continued to flee from the city. Within the secure confines of suburban municipalities, working-class whites created a world that looked remarkably like the city they had left behind... Fleeing whites brought the politics of local defensiveness with them to the suburbs, and found protection behind the visible and governmentally defended municipal boundaries of suburbia.³¹⁴

The grid-like streets of Warren on Detroit's northern perimeter were lined with 1950s and 1960s ranch style houses that looked strikingly similar to the homes of Courville, Seven-Mile Fenelon, and other parts of the city's East Side. In Southgate, Taylor, Wayne, Westland, and Garden City, tract housing covering the landscape seemed to mirror the

³¹³ Sugrue, 165-266.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 266.

homes on the city's West side. The primary difference was that these spaces were inhabited almost exclusively by whites.³¹⁵

In 1973, Detroit elected its first black mayor, Coleman Young. The African American leadership in the city successfully organized a campaign against the white leadership. But while Young's defeat of John F. Nichols, the Detroit police commissioner, offered hope to many blacks and some progressive whites, it also led to the exodus of the city's remaining white middle-class residents. Heather Ann Thompson argues that the shape of this departure was complex. Many whites, she explains, initially supportive of Young, left during his second term because they "grew increasingly uncomfortable with living in an increasingly black city."³¹⁶ But whites also left because employers moved their operations to surrounding suburban communities. In 1975, the city laid off more than 4,000 employees and soon afterward Chrysler's Jefferson Avenue plant, one of the few auto-plants remaining in the city proper, closed. In 1977, the city lost 56,400 jobs and the suburbs gained 36,500 jobs. Regardless, when middle-class residents exited the city, they took with them a substantial tax base, one essential to support and maintain an urban infrastructure. The income disparities between Detroit and surrounding suburbs demonstrate the devastating effects of white flight. By 1980, for example, the median income in Detroit was \$17,033, while in the bordering Wayne County suburb of Grosse Point Woods it was \$35,673.³¹⁷

Detroit's decline as an auto-industry power house is also evidenced by the unauthorized strike at Chrysler's Mack Avenue stamping plant in 1973. The Mack plant

³¹⁵ Thompson, 266.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 207.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 207.

reported one of the highest injury rates among auto-plants. A series of particularly horrific injuries in 1972 and 1973 led to an unauthorized work stoppage. In 1972, a die setter was killed when a bolster plate blew off a faulty machine and severed his head. Early in 1973, the fingers of a woman working on the cab-back line were cut off due to faulty machinery. And on August 4, 1973, a worker in the pressroom lost four fingers because a machine had never been repaired. Grievance procedures to the United Auto Workers union failed to produce satisfactory results. In June of 1973, workers organized a walkout. Still, the union ignored their pleas. Mack workers then decided to picket leaders at their Local 212 union on August 10. Four days later, after the union continued to neglect the concerns of the Mack rank and file, white autoworker Bill Gilbreth and black autoworker Clinton Smith went into the stubs welding department, sat down on the conveyor belt, and halted production. Soon other workers rallied around the two men. After being removed from the plant, workers appealed to their union leaders. UAW officials again refused to support them, so Mack workers decided to picket on their own. Union leaders saw the efforts as part of a broader conspiracy to disrupt plants across the city and to unseat the UAW. As a result, they determined to end the strike themselves. Union officials were assembled into four groups of 250. Each group marched to one of the Mack plant gates where workers were picketing and began to attack them. By August 16 the UAW had successfully broken the strike. Bill Bonds, a newscaster for the local WXYZ station noted that this was the “first time in the history of the UAW [that] the union mobilized to keep a plant open.”³¹⁸ According to Thomspson, the strike marked the beginning of the end for the power of Detroit autoworkers. During the 1970s, the UAW

³¹⁸ Thompson, 203.

leadership worked to cooperate with the Big Three at the expense of their rank and file members.³¹⁹

Thompson notes that by the spring of 1979, the total membership of the Big Three automakers was 840,000, down significantly from the high of 1,530,870 members in 1969. On December 17, 1979, 115,000 Big Three employees were on indefinite lay off, and 70,000 were on temporary lay off. By February 8, 1980, 174,000 were on indefinite lay off and 37,325 were on temporary lay off. On May 16, 1980, 304,144 workers formerly at Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors were unemployed. The election of Young and the decline of the auto-industry embodied the shifts in Detroit's urban culture; progressive changes in leadership were accompanied by economic devastation.

Thompson writes:

To be sure, liberals were now firmly in charge of the inner city and, since they were overwhelmingly African American, this was indeed an historic accomplishment. But sadly, these black liberals had come to lead a city that was increasingly isolated and economically eviscerated.³²⁰

Instead of directing their anger at corporate and union leadership, however, many whites chose to blame people of color for their precarious economic position. This blame game was perpetuated by local grassroots political machines. These politics, Sugrue argues, took deep roots in suburbia, particularly as the auto industry continued to reduce the Detroit labor force and shut down area plants during the 1970s and 1980s. Between 1969 and 1979, at least 30% of Village patrons were repeat visitors from Michigan. In Dearborn, where the Village is located, Orville Hubbard continued to run a local political machine that supported de facto segregation until 1977. Hubbard's politics are in many

³¹⁹ Thompson, 200-203.

³²⁰ Ibid., 216.

ways an extreme example of the local grassroots political machines that Sugrue identifies. But even if surrounding suburban communities did not share Hubbard's extremist racism, the reputation of Dearborn was significant enough to affect receptions, encounters, and views of the Village.³²¹

Dearborn and the Politics of White Flight

In March of 1969, Orville Hubbard arrived at the old Dearborn Inn, a popular motel for visitors to the Village. He was there to have lunch with the Dearborn Rotary Club which had invited Atlanta minister Ralph D. Abernathy to speak. Abernathy had taken over leadership of the Southern Christian leadership Conference after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Hubbard had often referred to Dr. King as a "son of a bitch" who stirred up trouble. But that day, Hubbard was cordial, welcoming Abernathy to the city and inviting him to take up residence in Dearborn. Abernathy replied that when he was finished "solving the problems of hunger and inequality," he might "retire" in Dearborn.³²² Hubbard said, "You're doing a good job."³²³

During his speech to the Rotarians, however, Abernathy was quick to point out that "Regardless of how safe and secure you may feel in Dearborn, you never will be free until your black brothers and sisters are free."³²⁴ Abernathy received a standing ovation. Hubbard later reflected on Abernathy's statements with a series of questions, however, that were indicative of his racist beliefs. "There are still a lot of questions I would like to

³²¹ Thompson, 216 and Sugrue, 266.

³²² Good, 328.

³²³ Ibid., 328.

³²⁴ Ibid., 329.

ask him,” he said, “What’s the remedy?” “Where else has the black man done as well as he has here?” and, then, “who got the black man out of the jungle in the first place?”³²⁵ Hubbard had not changed.

At the beginning of his thirteenth term, in 1968, biographer David L. Good notes, Hubbard had pushed Michigan’s first local stop-and-frisk ordinance through the city council. The ordinance allowed police to search “suspicious” persons. Although there was no mention of race, it was clear that the measure was a response to the 1967 riot.³²⁶

One year later, Michigan Governor George Romney signed a new open housing law. Dearborn had recently been integrated by the Reverend Arthur Knight and his family, who had been renting from a black landlord for two and a half years.³²⁷ But in January of 1969, shortly after Romney’s law went into effect, the family decided to return to Detroit because they had never been made to feel welcome.³²⁸ A reporter from Detroit’s black newspaper, the *Michigan Chronicle*, said that Knight had “moved to Dearborn to give his four children better education and environment,” but that in a city “which shelters headquarters for such groups as the Patriotic Party (Wallace for President) and the super right...his children have suffered.”³²⁹ Soon afterward, the Knights also accused Hubbard of refusing to add the name of their son Arthur, shot and killed at 20 in Vietnam, to the city’s war memorial. Roy Wilkins of the NAACP responded by labeling the mayor the nation’s “meanest man in race relations” and “a more dedicated segregationist (if that be possible) than Strom Thurmond, James Eastland,

³²⁵ Good, 329.

³²⁶ Ibid., 329.

³²⁷ Ibid., 329.

³²⁸ Ibid., 329.

³²⁹ “Dearborn Forces Out Lone Black Residents: Minister Can’t Stand Ridicule of His Children,” *The Michigan Chronicle*, June 15, 1968.

or George Wallace.”³³⁰ Hubbard defended his actions by claiming that Arthur Knight Jr. had never lived in Dearborn, and that the memorial was one created for residents and local school attendees only.³³¹

Soon, however, Hubbard returned to more blatant acts of racism. In January, he authorized the sale of a small park for residential development rather than rehabilitating the space. Improving the park, he claimed, would be “an open invitation for nonresidents to invade our city” and “We’d have a worse mess than we ever had on Kendal Street.”³³² Although that same year Hubbard supported black Detroit mayoral candidate Richard Austin, just a few months later he snubbed Inkster (a predominantly black city) when he sent Councilman George Bondie to substitute for him in the Mayors’ Day Exchange Program. He offered no explanation. In 1970 the city hosted the United Klans of America, alleviating any doubts that the majority of the city and its mayor had any intention of abandoning their racist values.³³³

In 1971, Hubbard became, according to Good, a symbol of Michigan’s antibusing sentiment in Michigan. The antibusing campaign in Dearborn was sparked by the appearance of Lester Maddox, lieutenant Governor of Georgia, who was campaigning for George Wallace. Hubbard arrived to introduce Maddox and encountered two protest groups. One group shouted the slogan, “Hey, hey, ho, ho. Orville Hubbard’s got to go.” The other, larger group responded by shouting “Ho, ho, hey, hey Orville Hubbard’s got to stay.” Although he was there to praise Maddox and the Wallace campaign, Good notes that Hubbard used the opportunity to incite panic among the crowd based on rumors that

³³⁰ As qtd. in Good, 329.

³³¹ Good, 330.

³³² As qtd. in Good, 330.

³³³ Good, 330.

Dearborn public school students would soon be bused into inner-city Detroit. Hubbard claimed that busing was “against all moral principles,” and that forced busing was “communistic” and symbolic of “tyranny in government.”³³⁴ Two days after Hubbard’s speech, Federal District Judge Stephen Roth directed the Michigan Board of Education to prepare a package of school integration proposals, including one that recommended busing students to and from suburban districts in the metropolitan area.³³⁵

In response, Hubbard hosted a rally; 1,600 people arrived in Dearborn to protest busing legislation. Along with Hubbard, several other politicians arrived to express their support of Hubbard’s position. Hubbard drew on his old argument regarding segregation. “People,” he said “have to be accepted.” He continued that even he was unwelcome in the more expensive subdivision of Dearborn (Dearborn Hills) unless he sprayed himself “with Chanel No. 5.”³³⁶ By January of 1972, Dearborn, and several other suburban districts joined together to challenge Roth’s busing plans. In March, the city Council moved to put three advisory propositions on the May presidential primary ballot. Hubbard asked his constituents to vote on the following question: “Are you in favor of amending the United States Constitution to prohibit forced busing and guarantee the right of each student to attend his neighborhood school?”³³⁷

Wallace used Dearborn’s antibusing sentiment to rally support for his campaign. In a rally at the Dearborn Youth Center, he called on the approximately 3,000 inside the building and 3,000 outside the building to oppose busing, big government, and liberals. In attendance that day was a Milwaukee busboy and janitor named Arthur Bremer. Six

³³⁴ As qtd. in Good, 338.

³³⁵ Good, 338.

³³⁶ As quoted in Good, 338.

³³⁷ Good, 339.

days later, while Wallace was campaigning in Laurel, Maryland, Bremer shot Wallace in the back paralyzing him for life. The following day, Wallace swept every precinct in Dearborn's Democratic primary, with 61% of the vote. Dearborn also approved Hubbard's anti-busing question with a vote of 29,037 to 5,409.³³⁸

Dearborn was not, however, the ethnically united suburban enclave that it had once been. For decades, the south end of Dearborn had been populated primarily by Eastern European immigrants. Often blue collar workers, they had long supported Hubbard. Slowly, however, the demographics of the area changed. By 1970, 5,500 of the areas residents identified themselves as Arab and Muslim; it was the largest and longest-established enclave of Arab Americans in the United States.³³⁹

The south end of Dearborn was anchored by the Rouge Factory making it a noisy and polluted place to live. The city plan of 1961 proposed making the area a distinctly industrial space. By 1971, residents were encouraged to sell their homes. Residents quickly formed a coalition to halt these activities, however. Alan Amen, spokesman for the community, charged that Hubbard and his men were "enemies of the working people." He continued, "We will not stop until we defeat or change this city government."³⁴⁰ Hubbard responded by promising home repair permits to anyone having difficulties with city hall's building department. Residents, however, were unimpressed. In October of 1971, in the midst of the busing controversy, residents filed suit against the city in federal court. They called for the end of urban renewal projects in the south end and the nearby Eugene-Porath neighborhood. Detroit attorney Abdenn Jabara claimed

³³⁸ Good, 340.

³³⁹ Ibid., 341.

³⁴⁰ As qtd. in Good, 341.

that the city of Dearborn's urban renewal was effectively a "form of cultural genocide."³⁴¹

Federal Judge Ralph M. Freeman was assigned the case in March of 1972.³⁴² He responded by issuing an order that would restrain the city from acquiring more property in either suburban neighborhood. Finally, in December of the same year, Freeman issued a preliminary ruling that city officials had indeed taken the "plaintiffs' property without due process of law" and that they had "destroyed the private market."³⁴³ But the city escaped accusations that they had violated the provision of equal protection and Freeman went on to say that he did not think the city's actions were based on xenophobia or the class status of each area's residents. The judge concluded then, that no monetary damages would be awarded. Rather, those who had sold their homes to the city could file individually for damages. However, Freeman's ruling did ensure that the city could no longer purchase property in the neighborhoods unless it was condemned.³⁴⁴

In 1974, Hubbard suffered a stroke that left him largely incapacitated. Still, he continued to serve as Dearborn's mayor until 1977. The mark of racism and bigotry that he left on the city, however, continued to shape its politics and reputation. Further, the confrontations that Hubbard engaged in during the late sixties and 1970s are indicative of those that shaped the metropolitan area as a whole. By 1980, Detroit faced not only racial, but economic challenges. The notion that the auto-industry could support Detroit's blue-collar and middle-class workforce was severely challenged. White and black auto-industry workers had been abandoned by union leadership and were being laid off at

³⁴¹ As qtd. in Good, 341.

³⁴² Good, 341.

³⁴³ As qtd. in Good, 341.

³⁴⁴ Good, 341.

rapid rates. The political leadership of the city rested in the hands of African Americans. While many had hoped that Young and his colleagues would integrate the city, his election was followed by continuing white flight from the city. Many whites must have felt that their control over their economic, social, and cultural destiny was slowly but surely slipping away.

At the Village, ingenuity, hard work, and pluck were linked to economic success. Traditional gender roles and the nuclear family were celebrated through the display of middle-class homes. George Washington Carver, who willingly adhered to the customs and politics of segregation, was the only African American “hero” on the Village landscape. Other representations of black life included the slave cabins, which remained largely closed for public viewing, and Robert Mattox’s decaying tenement house. These depictions of the past would have lent support to blue collar workers looking for evidence that liberal political policies, rather than the decisions of corporate and union leaders, were to blame for their economic problems.

The next section details the landscape and organizational changes that occurred at the Village during the late sixties and through the 1970s. It also draws on visitor surveys conducted in these years. Village administrators consulted outside marketing firms in an attempt to understand what patrons did and did not like about their experience to the site and to change the Village in response. These surveys also explicate reasons that visitors came to the Village, and why they kept returning. On the whole, primary sources demonstrate the often contradictory impulses that led patrons to purchase tickets to Henry Ford’s Greenfield Village. The same impulses that shaped the cultural, economic, and

political landscape of the nation, similarly shaped encounters between administrators and patrons, between patrons and the Village landscape.

Additions and Improvements: William Clay Ford's Capital Campaign

One year after the riots, a small item in the *Detroit Free Press's* "Action Line" appeared concerning the Village and its slave huts urging the site to open them for public viewing. In 1968, Robert Dawson, Director of Public Relations wrote a form letter to address the concerns of at least eight people. Dawson wrote:

Thank you for your recent letter to the Director of Collections at Greenfield Village concerning the Slave Huts. Your letter was one of a very few received as a result of an article which appeared in "Action Line." I'm enclosing some information which may be of interest to you concerning the Slave Huts and the Village and Museum in general. You will note in the descriptive material that the Slave Huts are in an area of related exhibits. These include the Logan County Courthouse, the George Washington Carver Memorial, and the Mattox House. The latter was a plantation overseer's cottage. Although there is still very little public interest in the Slave Huts, we are opening them to visiting school classes on special request.³⁴⁵

The slave houses and their representation would become a major concern for newly elected president Harold K. Skramstad in 1980. By then, the structures were renamed the "slave quarters," and Skramstad would not only open them, but also institute an African American Cultures program. But in 1968, a few letters would not move Dawson or his colleagues to change the site's representation of African Americans.

There were significant changes to the Village between 1968 and 1979, but these changes are indicative of an administration working to target and attract the site's

³⁴⁵ "Letter from Robert Dawson," Box 34, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

primary market. In 1969, administrators worked with marketing firms to conduct more sophisticated and thorough visitor surveys. According to this research, the greatest numbers of patrons attending the Village were self-identified as residents of the metropolitan area and middle class. Additions and alterations to the Village landscape focused on expanding the site's function as a leisure space (see Figure 3.1).

Administrators were attempting not only to shape how visitors viewed the past, but also to meet visitor expectations, needs and desires concerning the past. A review of how the Village changed provides us with a sense of how visitors used the site during this period and of what administrators believed visitors hoped and expected to gain from their encounters with the American past.

In 1969, the Village elementary school closed. Ford had envisioned that the Village would be both museum and school, but his ambitious project was too expensive to continue. Although administrators would find funding to re-open the schools in the 1990s, for the time being, the Village was now, officially, a museum only. The closing of the school, however, was accompanied by the addition of two other educational departments, School Services and Adult Education. Further, in 1972, children visiting the Village were offered the opportunity to spend "A Day in a One Room School" at the Miller School. In 1976, the Village extended the



Figure 3.1: Village map ca. 1968. Box 1, Accession #21, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

program to the McGuffey School. Children read from the *McGuffey* readers and studied the historic objects that appeared in the stories if they were available.³⁴⁶

As the 1960s came to a close, administrators and patrons celebrated Edison's invention of the light bulb and the Village's 40th anniversary. On October 21, 1969, William Clay Ford announced a \$20 million dollar expansion and development program. In his history of the Village, George C. Upward explains that the "board of trustees recognized the necessity of a financial shot in the arm, not only to provide adequate maintenance of existing facilities, but to inaugurate more progressive interpretation and education programs."³⁴⁷ Like Colonial Williamsburg and other outdoor museums, the board of trustees was aware of the institutional shifts in other museums. In announcing the expansion, Ford said that "The enormous increase in attendance and the evolution of the institute as a diverse educational and cultural center have consumed earlier gifts, and it is only through these new funds that the achievements and momentum of the past can be preserved."³⁴⁸

Although both the Henry Ford Museum and the Village benefited from the campaign, the Village received immediate attention. The two largest projects were the construction of a perimeter railroad—opened in 1973—and the addition of a turn-of-the-century amusement park (Suwanee Park), which neared completion in 1974 (see Figure 3.2). Upward writes that the "riverfront park, neatly nestled between the Suwanee Lagoon, the old Rouge River bed and the rear road of residential row, flourished by mid-

³⁴⁶ Upward, 169.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁴⁸ As qtd. in Upward, 151.

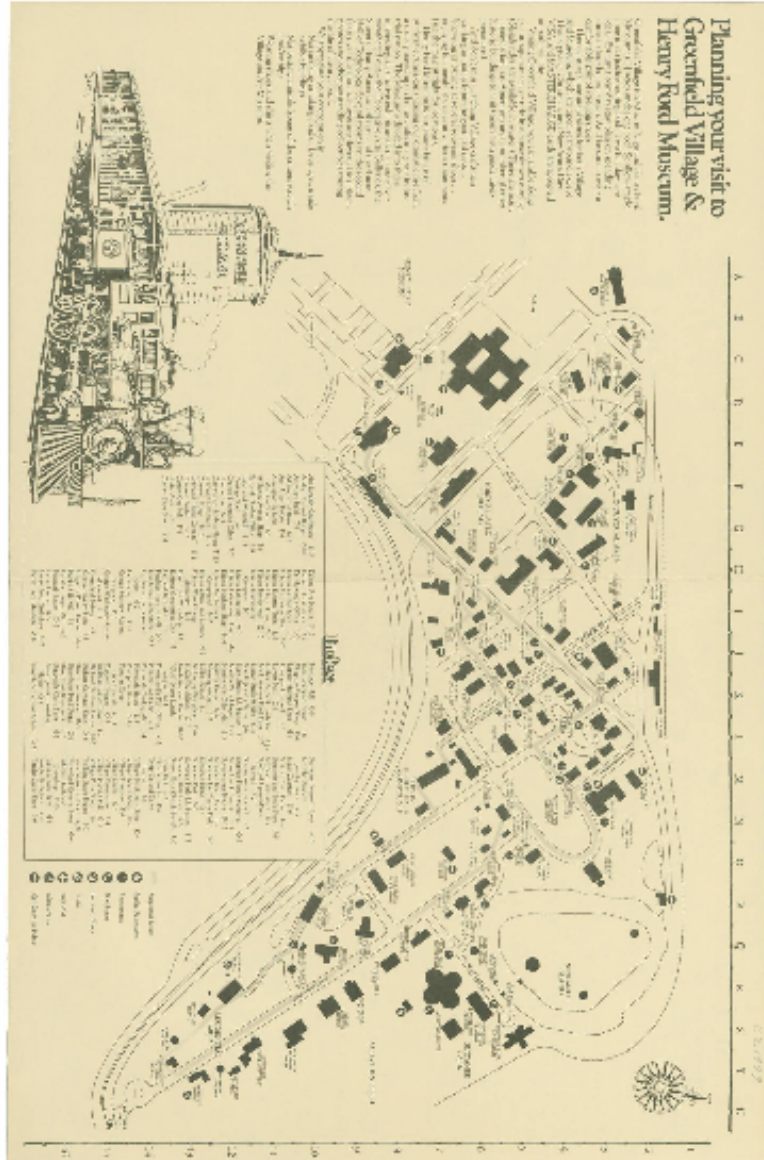


Figure 3.2: Map of Village, 1979. Note the addition of the amusement park area. Box 1, Accession #21, Edison Institute Records, The Henry Ford.

summer as clearly a ‘hands-on’ historical experience.”³⁴⁹ The amusement park included a bandstand, lagoon, railroad station; an ice cream parlor, a gift shop, and a new Riverfront Restaurant. The furnishings for the ice cream parlor came from the Clark Drugstore, built in 1870 in Natick, Massachusetts, and the penny arcade, housed 32 original 1898-1932 machines. A Herschell-Spillman carousel, built around 1913, and a raft ride to Suwanee Island, completed the park. Finally, the campaign provided funds to move and reconstruct an early 18th century saltbox from Andover, Connecticut to fill what administrators felt was a gap in the history of house architecture.³⁵⁰

Grounds improvements were a secondary focus of the campaign. New brick sidewalks and benches were added in 1972, and in 1973 the gatehouse was remodeled and enlarged. The Pond ‘n’ Coop restaurant also opened near the Ackley Covered Bridge. Flood protection was added and sanitary sewer systems were installed. The parking lots were enlarged and a 22,500 foot storage building was built behind the Henry Ford Museum. The crafts center also received attention in 1975. A bakery was added to the section, and new demonstrations included pottery, pewter, and tin.³⁵¹

While the Country Fair of Yesteryear and Let Freedom Ring remained staple special events, administrators also added several new ones (see Figures 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5). The Old Time Summer Festival was first held in 1971. It included historical vignettes, outdoor dramas, roving musical groups, and a Town Hall variety Show. In 1972, the Autumn Harvest Festival and Antique Fire Apparatus Muster debuted in 1972. And in 1973, just as Detroit elected Coleman Young mayor, the village hosted the Colonial

³⁴⁹ Upward, 157.

³⁵⁰ Upward, 153

³⁵¹ Ibid., 160.



Figure 3.3: Country Fair of Yesteryear in 1969 on the Village Green. The event continued to be a success by drawing on a variety of rituals that counted as “history,” such as dancing around a May Pole. Box 101, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, The Henry Ford.



Figure 3.4: Country Fair of Yesteryear in 1970. Note the two African American men in the background, one of the few photos during this period in which black visitors appear. Box 101, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.



Figure 3.5: Let Freedom Ring special event, 1968. Visitors stand while they listen to the “Star Spangled Banner.” The Let Freedom Ring event marks the ways in which many special events were linked to patriotism. Box 103, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford

Military Muster Festival. That same year, the Village hosted the Phil Donahue Show. In 1978, the Ancient Fife and Drum Corps Muster showed, according to Upward, “the lighter side of military life.”³⁵² The capital campaign and the massive alterations, additions, and improvements to the Village landscape were instituted by growing Village staff. In 1968, William Clay Ford’s election to the post of chairman of the board of trustees was followed by the appointment of Donald A. Shelley as president of the institute and a trustee. Shelley remained in the position until 1976, when Frank Caddy took over. Robert G. Wheeler, who had served as director of crafts since 1967 was appointed vice-president in 1969; his responsibilities were focused on research and interpretation. In 1976, his responsibilities shifted to collections and presentation. The bicentennial saw other administrative shifts as well. George Johnson moved from director of grounds and Buildings to vice-president of corporate services and J. Robert Dawson, director of Public Relations, became vice-president of public affairs. In 1978, the Department of Education expanded, forming a separate division within Edison Institute as a whole and directed by David T. Glick.

Although the Village administration changed and expanded, the board of trustees remained dominated by the Ford family. By 1979, the board of trustees included: Henry Ford II (since 1943); Edith McNaughton Ford (1971); Walter Buhl Ford (1971); Lynn Ford Alandt (1978); and Sheila Firestone Ford (1978). The Village’s representation of the past would continue to be financially guided by the Ford family.³⁵³

Village administrators like those at other historic sites and museums across the country hoped to gain new and increased patronage during the Bicentennial. The report

³⁵² Upward, 162-163.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 163.

details the factors that administrators might consider as they move forward with a marketing plan for the Bicentennial. In general, the report is quite optimistic, noting that despite economic hardships, they suspected that many Americans would choose to make the Village a part of their Bicentennial celebration. They accurately predicted that the Village would receive at least 1,725,000 visitors that year. The authors also list the negative factors that the administration should be aware of, including a “growing resentment (or, more accurately, jealousy) on the part of such Detroit groups as Central Businesses District Association, the Chamber of Commerce, New Detroit and, occasionally, but to a lessening degree, the Convention Bureau.”³⁵⁴ This detail embodies the tension between downtown and the surrounding areas. The reported “jealousy” is unsurprising given the economic crises facing downtown during the mid-1970s. As downtown businesses lost customers, suburban enterprises gained them. It also, reflects, however, that although businesses in the metro-area and downtown may have shared a customer base and information, they increasingly viewed themselves as distinct places. The segregation felt among business owners reflected the racial and economic segregation that shaped the metro-area landscape.³⁵⁵

Brewster Associates Incorporated, long the Village’s marketing firm, produced a report based on the assessment of the Bicentennial report, “Tapping the Tourist and Convention Market.”³⁵⁶ This report also reflects a growing anxiety surrounding the Village’s identification with Detroit. The authors write that, “In view of the negative

³⁵⁴ “Bicentennial Year Travel Intentions,” Box 9, Accession #143, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 14.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁵⁶ “Tapping the Tourist and Convention Market: A Proposal to the T&C Committee Dearborn Chamber of Commerce,” Box 35, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 1.

press coverage of Detroit's myriad problems, and the anticipated 1978 opening of Michigan's Cedar Point (a competing amusement park), a strong 1977 effort on Dearborn's part would appear just the opening gambit in the long-term struggle for the tourist and convention dollar."³⁵⁷ Regardless of the administration's fears surrounding the reputation of the Village, however, they achieved their attendance goals. The Bicentennial marked their most successful years to date.

In 1979, administrators announced a 50th anniversary celebration. The birthday began in 1978, with the reactivation of Edison's machinery in the Fort Myers Laboratory. Patrons could attend special anniversary tours of both the Henry Ford Museum and the Village beginning in the winter of 1979. According to Upward, these tours emphasized "the development of lighting; Edison's other inventions and their impact on daily life; and some of Henry Ford's lesser know activities and interests." On February 11, Edison's birthday, a commemorative exhibit was opened in the Menlo Park Laboratory. The Famous Americans Lecture Series also celebrated the birthday events with addresses on Thomas Edison, George Washington Carver, and Henry Ford.³⁵⁸

The meta-historical narrative ever-present at the Village was also particularly palpable as administrators celebrated the anniversary of the Village and represented America's pre-industrial past. Those attending the October, 21 1929 ceremonies at The Centennial of Light and the Golden Anniversary of the Edison Institute Banquet watched a brief historic film depicting Edison's invention of the incandescent lamp as he re-enacted it at the Golden Jubilee events of October 21, 1929.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ "Tapping the Tourist and Convention Market," 1.

³⁵⁸ Upward, 167.

³⁵⁹ *The Centennial of Light and the Golden Anniversary of the Edison Institute Banquet Program.*

If Ford's initial goal was to use the Village to demonstrate the inevitable line of American progress, during the late 1970s a national counter-narrative also shaped encounters with the site. A reporter from *Time Magazine* noted that the Golden Jubilee was a reminder of America's decline as a global leader in technology and science. They titled their article "The Sad State of Innovation: New Ideas are Stifled by Red Tape and Corporate Timidity."³⁶⁰ As evidence, the author points to the decline in patent numbers, and spending on research and development:

Most of the important indicators are pointing down. The number of patents granted to U.S. citizens dropped from 56,000 in 1971 to 44,482 last year. Spending on research and development, which peaked at 3% of G.N.P. in 1964, was only 2.2% last year. While the U.S. percentage has been decreasing, West Germany's has averaged 3% annually since 1971, and last year increased to 3.2%. Japan's has risen from 1.3% in 1965 to 1.9% in 1977.³⁶¹

These numbers would have fed the American fear that the nation would lose its status as global superpower. The author goes on to ask what Americans can learn from the life and habits of Edison by looking beyond the myths surrounding his life. "Edison," they write, "had habits of mind that can still be useful to would-be inventors and their bosses." "One was simple," they continue, "but incredible—persistence."³⁶² Michael Wallace argues that Ford constructed the Village to celebrate individuality rather than the collective. The landscape expressed his disgust for the growing popularity of unions and the explosion of federal government. In the 1970s, solutions to collective problems were often posed in the same language that had permeated the tours and signage at the Village for decades: hard work and discipline. This language offered both reassurance and

³⁶⁰ "The Sad State of Innovation: New Ideas are Stifled by Red Tape and Corporate Timidity," *Time Magazine*. October 22, 1979, 70-73.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 73.

motivation. The *Times* article points to Edison's persistence as a reason for his success. Similarly, many Americans continued to look to individuals to solve collective cultural, social, and economic problems. But Ford's goals for the Village were likely influenced not only by his views on class, but also race and ethnicity. Visitors to the Village, particularly white blue collar and middle-class visitors, may have also been influenced by a more complex confluence of anxieties.

In the *Times* article lie clues to the ways in which anxieties about gender, race, and class may have shaped the visitor experience at the Village during the 1970s. The landscape of the Village paid homage to the self-made man, the inventor, the middle class, and implicitly, populist values and racial and ethnic hierarchies. Upward's accounting of the additions and alterations to the Village during this period indicates that the changes to the landscape—the addition of rides and special events—supported the established narrative. But as the auto-industry declined, as Detroit became divided between black and white residents, as white blue-collar and middle-class Americans felt abandoned by the Democratic Party, as gender roles were challenged and redefined by feminism and black activism, and as notions of American progress were challenged by economic myths and realities, the visitor's interpretation of the landscape as a celebration of American progress likely shifted.³⁶³ The Village may have also been viewed with a growing sense of nostalgia, one that was based on anxieties rooted in the present.

Beginning in the late 1960s, administrators conducted more rigorous visitor surveys. Although the surveys provide limited information, they do offer a means of exploring the visitor's encounter with the Village. Further, administrators often altered

the site in response to visitor comments and complaints. The following section considers the surveys, then, as a dialogue between the administration, the site, and the visitor.

Encounters with the Village (1968-1979)

During 1968, the *Michigan Chronicle* mentioned a multitude of efforts aimed at educating the city's black population about their history and heritage. Afro History topics were organized at Detroit's Hilliger Elementary school.³⁶⁴ An Afro-American History class was introduced at the University of Detroit after students submitted a petition.³⁶⁵ And the *Chronicle* proudly announced 1968's "Negro History Week Now an Obsolete Device," because "more and more black children are finding the pathway to knowledge about their past illuminated by newly published books; and by enlightened teachers often using homemade materials resulting from their own search for information about Afro-American culture."³⁶⁶ That same year, the Village celebrated Edison's invention of the light bulb. The *Chronicle* also noted Edison's achievement with a four page spread entitled "Thomas A. Edison Cleared Way For 'A Century of Progress.'"³⁶⁷ Throughout this detailed accounting of Edison's achievements, the author never mentions the Village.

Certainly, the metro-area black population was aware of the Village and the Henry Ford Museum. This article reflects the disconnect between the site and the area's black population. Again, in a survey of special events photographs taken during this

³⁶⁴ "Organized Afro History Topics at Hilliger School," *The Michigan Chronicle*, Saturday, May 4, 1968, Sect. A.

³⁶⁵ S.A. Greg, "Afro-American History Class Introduced at U-D," *The Michigan Chronicle*, February 24, 1968, Sect. A.

³⁶⁶ "Negro History Week Now an Obsolete Device," *Michigan Chronicle*, February 17, 1968, Sect. A.

³⁶⁷ "Thomas A. Edison Cleared Way for 'A Century of Progress,'" *Michigan Chronicle*, February 24, 1968, Sect. F.

period, out of 1,094 photos, 208 showed African Americans. Of those black Americans in the photos, 156 were children, indicating that they were likely there on a school trip rather than visiting with their families.³⁶⁸ During 1968, Mayor Orville Hubbard and white Dearbornites clarified their positions on race and race relations. Four months after the Edison article, the *Chronicle* would make Reverend Arthur Knight and his family's decision to leave Dearborn the paper's front page headline. And in that piece, the reporter noted that the city's population had long been labeled as racist. Considered in conjunction with a review of the site's photographs of visitors, it is probable that the Village appealed, perhaps more because of its location than its content, primarily to whites. A review of visitor surveys, however, allows for a better understanding of the shape of visitors that populated the Village landscape during the late sixties and 1970s.

On October 23, 1969, the Public Relations Department presented Village administrators with a survey of the 1969 summer visitor population. They noted that the purpose of the survey was to "obtain a better picture of the demographics of those who visit Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum during summer months."³⁶⁹ They were also hoping to discover what "these visitors found most interesting at both facilities, and what they did not particularly care for."³⁷⁰ The questions were framed not only by the public relations department at the Village, but also by Brewster Associates, Inc., the site's advertising agency. Consulting services of Dr. R.A. Krachenberg and the School of

³⁶⁸ "Special Event Photos," Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

³⁶⁹ "Visitor Survey, Summer, 1969," Box 23, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 1.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

Business Administration at the University of Michigan were also utilized.³⁷¹ These surveys continued with slight changes to the questions and changes regarding when they were distributed through 1982, but in this chapter, the twenty-five surveys conducted between 1969 and 1979, the site's fifty-year anniversary, are examined. In 1980, the site's landscape and interpretive program began to change dramatically, so the surveys conducted between 1969 and 1979 asked patrons to respond to questions surrounding a similar Village landscape. Each survey consisted of various numbers of respondents. For example, in the Fall 1975 survey, 448 forms were distributed between September 22 and October 25. Visitors were asked to return their form by November 2. A total of 263 were received, for a response of 59%.³⁷² During the winter survey of 1979, 350 surveys were distributed and 128 were returned for a response of 37%.³⁷³ Regardless of the number of surveys distributed and received, this analysis focuses on those surveys administrators described as statistically significant. Survey questions frequently changed during this period; the most consistently asked questions were:

1. Where are you from?
2. What is the head of household's occupation?
3. What is your household income?
4. What is the age of the head of household?
5. Is this your first visit to the Village?
6. How did you hear about the Village and the Henry Ford Museum?
7. What part of the Village did you enjoy the most?
8. What part of the Village did you enjoy the least?
9. Did you know that the Village and the Henry Ford Museum are not connected to the Ford Motor Company or the Ford Foundation?
10. Did the national economy affect your vacation plans?

³⁷¹ "Visitor Survey, Summer, 1969," 1.

³⁷² "Visitor Survey, Fall, 1975," Box 33, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 2.

³⁷³ "Visitor Survey, Winter and Spring 1979," Box 55, #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 1.

11. Is your family planning one or more vacation trips to learn about American Heritage because of the Bicentennial?

From the answers to these questions, the typicality of patrons was determined. Further, answers to these questions inform a contemplation of the site's popularity.

The typical visitor to the Village resided in Michigan; between 1969 and 1979 at least 30% of Village visitors were residents of the state (see Figure 3.6). Clearly, a resident of Michigan could have visited the Village by investing a smaller amount of time and money than someone from another state, whose travel time and budget would have been greater. Other visitors were likely to arrive from the surrounding mid-western states such as Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. In the spring of 1978, administrators only asked visitors to indicate whether their residence was in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, or Ontario. At that point, surveyors noted that these states were their principle target market. The Brewster Associates Incorporated report "Tapping the Tourist and Convention Market," came to similar conclusions. This report also identified the Village's primary markets both for one day and overnight guests based on answers from respondents concerning the duration of their travel time.³⁷⁴ In the spring of 1978 surveyors reported a significant jump in patrons who reported their hometown as "Other." But at the same time, surveyors eliminated Pennsylvania, New York, and Wisconsin as options for hometown states.

³⁷⁴ "Tapping the Tourist and Convention Market: A Proposal to the T&C Committee Dearborn Chamber of Commerce," Box 35, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

Responses to Visitor Survey Question: Where are you from?

	Michigan	Ohio	Illinois	Indiana	Pennsylvania	New York	Wisconsin	Ontario	Other
1958	36%	25%	7%	4%	5%	4%	2%	4%	0%
1961	37%	24%	7%	5%	5%	4%	2%	3%	0%
1962	35%	28%	7%	5%	5%	4%	2%	3%	0%
1963	42%	19%	7%	3%	5%	2%	5%	6%	0%
1964	33%	27%	8%	5%	3%	2%	2%	3%	0%
1965	30%	28%	9%	7%	4%	4%	3%	3%	0%
1966	30%	27%	8%	7%	4%	4%	3%	3%	0%
1967	41%	21%	9%	5%	3%	3%	3%	2%	0%
1968	34%	28%	9%	6%	3%	3%	3%	2%	0%
1973 Summer	37%	28%	7%	6%	2%	2%	2%	2%	0%
Winter 1977/ Spring 1978									
1978 Spring	36%	19%	5%	4%	0%	0%	0%	4%	34%
1979 Spring	30%	17%	6%	4%	0%	0%	0%	3%	41%
1979 Winter	35%	19%	4%	6%	0%	0%	0%	2%	34%
1979 Winter	40%	15%	7%	5%	0%	0%	0%	3%	31%

Figure 3.6: Table based on compiled data from survey question “Where are you from?” “License Plate Survey Comparison 1958-1966,” Box 20, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1967,” Box 23, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1976 Winter/1977 Spring,” Box 43, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, the Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey 1977,” Box 43, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1978 Spring,” Box 45, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1979 Spring,” Box 54, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1979 Winter,” Box 54, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

A correlation of visitor survey statistics with historical statistics about Michigan reflects a more complete picture of the politics of visitors, and consequently, the political worldview with which these patrons approached the Village. During the 1970s, a majority of Michigan residents voted for the Republican Party. The popular vote during presidential races in Michigan was traditionally close; and for many years the state voted Republican. But between the 1940s and the 1960s, the agendas of these parties were in flux. In 1964, most Michigan residents, like the nation, supported John F. Kennedy's successor. That year, 2,137,000 votes went to Lyndon B. Johnson, while 1,060,000 votes were cast for Republican candidate Barry Goldwater. In 1968, Michigan residents cast 1,593,000 votes for Hubert Humphrey, 1,060,000 votes for Richard Nixon, and, perhaps most indicative of the state's growing conservatism, 332,000 votes for George Wallace. In 1972, Richard Nixon received 1,962,000 votes, while George McGovern received 1,459,000 votes. In 1976, despite the debacle of Watergate, 1,894,000 votes were cast for Gerald Ford while Jimmy Carter received 1,697,000. In 1980, Ronald Reagan received 1,915,000, while Jimmy Carter garnered 1,662,000 votes.³⁷⁵

As qualitative evidence presented earlier in this chapter demonstrates, those voting for Republican candidates were more likely to live in the areas surrounding Detroit, white, and middle-class. In these presidential elections, the social, cultural, and economic turmoil created by social movements, shifts in race relations, changing gender roles, and Vietnam, were center-stage. Democrats were identified as the political party of women and people of color. White families who had voted for Democrats expressed their

³⁷⁵ John P. McIver "Popular Votes Cast for President, by State and Political Party: 1836-2000," from Richard Such and Susan B. Carter, eds. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition Online* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

growing alienation from the party. In the south, this shifting in political parties and constituents was even more dramatic. But in Michigan and the Midwest, where blacks were fighting for and gaining political power in urban areas, conservative whites were also drawn to the Republican party. By considering the income and self-identified occupation of visitors in conjunction with statistical data about the Detroit metro-area, it becomes clear that a majority of Michigan patrons approached the Village with a populist and conservative worldview.

An examination of how respondents described their occupations and of their income further supports the assertion that a majority of patrons were white and thus more likely to view the world with the conflicted lens of populist conservatism. Between 1969 and 1979, several surveys asked respondents to self-identify their occupation and income. Occupations were grouped into three categories: blue-collar, white-collar, and professional. Clearly, these questions are problematic because they rely on the honesty of respondents, and assume a blanket understanding of what constitutes a blue-collar, white-collar, and professional occupation. Still, when compared to national statistics about income, this data adds to an understanding of the texture of the visitor experience.

Nine of the twenty-five visitor surveys asked patrons to self-identify their occupation as “blue-collar,” “working-class,” or “professional” (see Figure 3.7). In 1969, 33% of blue-collar workers identified themselves as blue-collar, 49% identified as white-collar workers, and 18% identified as professionals. By the winter of 1978, only 20% of respondents identified themselves as blue-collar workers, 27% identified as white-collar workers, and 53% self-identified as professional workers. Because patrons self-identified, a better picture of their class is gained through a discussion of their reported income.

Visitor Survey Responses to Question: What is your occupation?

	Professional	White Collar	Blue Collar
1969	18%	49%	33%
1970	27%	44%	30%
1971	19%	48%	33%
1972	23%	52%	23%
1976 Winter/ 1977 Spring	20%	41%	9%
1977 Spring	7%	43%	13%
1977 Summer	19%	50%	30%
1977 Fall	53%	27%	20%
1978 Winter	53%	27%	20%

Figure 3.7: Table created based on data compiled from survey question “What is your occupation?” Note: Beginning in 1976 Winter the question changed to “What is your occupation?” from surveys: “Visitor Survey, 1970,” Box 24, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, the Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey: 1971,” Box 26, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, the Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1972,” Box 27, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, the Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1976 Winter/1977 Spring, 1977 Spring, and 1977 Fall” Box 43, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, the Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1978 Winter,” Box 45, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

Thirteen of the twenty-five surveys asked patrons to report the household income. No table is included of these figures because the options listed for household income were inconsistent in the survey questions. In 1969, 28% of respondents reported that their household income was under \$10,000, 41% reported an income between \$10,000 and \$15,000, 23% reported an income between \$15,000 and \$25,000, and 8% reported an income of \$25,000 plus. In the winter of 1979, 6% of respondents reported an income under \$10,000, 8% reported an income between \$10,000 and \$15,000, 16% reported an income between \$15,000 and \$20,000, and 33% reported an income between \$20,000 and \$30,000.

The shifts in self-identified occupation might be related, in part to shifts in the Detroit metro-area. As the auto-industry declined, there were fewer positions available for blue collar workers. In 1969, the median income for white households before taxes was \$8,755 and for black households the median household income was \$5,292. Ten years later, white households reported a median income of \$17,259, while black Americans reported a yearly median income of \$10,133.³⁷⁶ Given that most visitors self-reported incomes higher than the national median income in surveys conducted between 1969 and 1979, and given that their incomes continued to increase, it is likely, then that visitors, were more likely to be identified by themselves and others as part of the middle or upper middle-class.

Thirteen of the twenty-five surveys conducted asked visitors to identify their age. No table is included because the options listed for age bracket were inconsistent between

³⁷⁶ Paul H. Linder, "Median and mean money income of households before taxes, and Gini coefficients, by race and ethnicity of householder: 1967-1998," from Richard Such and Susan B. Carter, eds. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition Online*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

1969 and 1979. In 1969, 6% of respondents to the survey were under 24, 19% that they were between the ages of 25 and 34, 51% that they were between the ages of 35 and 49, and 25% that they were between 50 and 65. By 1979, respondents were on the whole slightly older. Three percent reported an age of under 25, 30% reported an age between 25 and 34, 25% between 35 and 44, 20% between 45 and 54, and 17% between 55 and 64. In general, then, a large portion of patrons were 25 and older. The age of patrons may account for the large percentage of visitors who were returning for a repeat visit.

A consistently high percentage of visitors were “repeaters.” Between 1969 and 1979, at least 30% of visitors reported that this was not their first visit to the site (see Figure 3.8). This percentage increased throughout the decade, peaking during the summer of 1976, when 57% of visitors were repeaters. Residents of Michigan would have found it easier to repeat their visits to the Village; although the surveys do not explicate where repeat visitors were from, it is more likely that they were those who could visit on the spur of the moment, without planning a family vacation. The high and consistent number of repeat visitors also supports the assertion that the Village landscape was used in a variety of ways, including as an alternative public space. Paradoxically, a site that encourages individuality and gumption simultaneously supported collective leisure experiences. Even administrators recognized the appeal of the site as a leisure space when they focused their attention on adding more “amusements.” Certainly, patrons may have returned to the site simply because it offered them and their families “something to do.” But the site’s meta-historical narrative also encouraged a multiplicity of uses, functions, and encounters. Returning patrons encountered the Village with several frames of reference in mind.

Visitor Survey Responses to Question: Is this your first visit to the Village?

	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973 Spr.	1973 Sum.	1973 Fall	1973 Wint / 1974 Spr.	1974 Sum.	1974 Fall	1974 Wint /1975 Spr.	1975 Spr.	1975 Sum.	1975 Fall	1975 Wint/ 1976 Spr.	1976 Spr.	1976 Sum.	1976 Fall	1977 Sum.	1977 Fall	1978 Spr.	1978 Fall	1978 Wint.	1979 Spr.	1979 Wint.
First Time	66%	65%	45%	63%	48%	64%	67%	60%	50%	50%	53%	55%	54%	54%	53%	34%	43%	43%	46%	50%	62%	61%	62%	55%	51%
Repeat	34%	35%	54%	32%	52%	36%	33%	40%	44%	34%	47%	45%	46%	46%	47%	62%	57%	52%	54%	44%	38%	39%	38%	45%	49%

Figure 3.8: Table compiled from survey answers to question “Is this your first visit to the Village?” from surveys: “Visitor Survey, 1969 and 1970” Box 24, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey: 1971,” Box 26, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, the Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1972,” Box 27, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, the Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1973 Spring, Summer, and Fall” Box 28, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1973 Winter/1974 Spring, Summer, Fall, and Visitor Survey 1974 Winter/1975 Spring,” Box 30, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1975 Spring, Summer, and Fall” Box 33, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1975 Winter/1976 Spring, 1976 Spring, 1976 Winter/1977 Spring, 1977 Spring, 1977 Summer, and 1977 Fall,” Box 43, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1978 Spring, 1978 Fall, 1978 Winter, 1979 Spring, and 1979 Winter,” Box 45, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

First, respondents encountered representations of the pre-industrial past in the immediate present.

Perhaps they walked through Orville and Wilbur Wright's bicycle shop and childhood home. They may have sat on the Village Green. They likely toured Menlo Park and then made their way into the homes of Stephen Foster, Noah Webster, and William McGuffey. Tour guides and signage explained details about the lives of these men and their wives. As visitors encountered guides and signs they also noted, however, the history of the Village's construction and of Ford's interest in the buildings. Finally, if they were visiting for a second, third, or fourth time, patrons were also guided by their own memories of previous visits. Repeat patrons, then, may have been motivated to visit the Village because it offered an alternative leisure space that mirrored the landscape of a small downtown, because of their nostalgic memories of prior visits to the Village, or because of their interest in the site's representation of the past or in the history of the Village. Repeat visitors were likely able to ignore the history and interact primarily with these spaces as familiar rather than extraordinary. Nostalgia became second-nature, not a special occasion.

The personal nature of visits to the Village and its use as a leisure space is also supported by data describing how patrons found out about the Village. Of the twenty-five surveys conducted, sixteen asked patrons to indicate how they found out about the Village. No table is included because the options listed changed over time. A majority of respondents noted that they found out about the Village from at least two or more sources. An overwhelming majority of respondents reported, however, that they found out about the Village from friends and relatives. Between 1972 Summer and 1973

Winter/1974 Spring, no visitors reported that they found out about the Village from friends or relatives. This discrepancy is probably because visitors were not given the option of indicating friends and relatives as a source. In 1974, however, 77% of visitors noted friends and relatives as their source of knowledge about the Village. And the percentage continues to be high throughout the rest of the 1970s. The Village's popularity, then, was due in large part to "word of mouth." Although some respondents said that they heard about the Village by reading the newspaper, seeing a television ad, or because their children told them to visit after going on a school trip, an overwhelming majority noted that they came because it was recommended to them by other people they knew well. Visits to the Village were motivated by personal relationships and communications. The Village did not become popular simply because Americans saw the site advertised, but because people had such positive experiences that they chose to tell others about it. As families and friends communicated about the site, they likely not only focused on the historical narratives at the Village, but also on the positive experiences they had using the space for leisure time with the people that they cared for.

Visitors were also given the opportunity to write down any comments they felt the survey did not address. These positive and negative comments made by patrons concerning their Village experience echo the multi-layered encounters between patrons and the site. Although surveyors attempted to categorize these comments, these categories usually changed each time a new survey was conducted. On the whole, however, visitors commented about whether they did or did not enjoy the exhibits most often. The other comments made, however, usually focused on how well the site functioned as a leisure space. Patrons expressed either happiness with or dismay at the

food, the cleanliness of the site, the number of bathrooms available, or the amount of walking necessary to view the entire Village. These comments, then, are largely reflective of the many functions that the Village served. It was not only an educational historic site, but also entertainment.

Although individual positive and negative comments do not yield statistical data, surveyors did ask students to make broad statements about what aspects of the Village they liked most and least. Patrons were consistently more impressed with the homes than with any other aspect of the Village experience. They were more likely to enjoy a tour of Ford's home than Menlo Park, although these buildings were usually second on the list. Homes were often also the "least liked," but patrons usually qualified this distaste in their individual written comments noting that they were disappointed that some of the homes were either partially or completely closed and could not be viewed. Why, in a state whose identity was grounded in a pre-industrial heritage, were Edison's buildings not as interesting to visitors as the homes? Certainly, most of the structures at the Village were, in fact, homes, which may account for their consistent popularity; there were simply more homes to see. But patrons may have also felt a particular affinity for the homes because they contained objects that were more familiar than those in Edison's laboratory. Set in the pre-industrial past, the material objects in the homes dated to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Patrons encountered objects and furniture that they could find in their grandparents and perhaps even their own living rooms, dining rooms, and bedrooms. Further, if a majority of patrons were white collar workers, they had not made their fortune working in industrial workshops, but behind a desk. Even blue-collar workers would have found Menlo Park unfamiliar. The homes contained objects that

connected to the personal lives of visitors. Such familiarity similarly supports the site as an example of the values of populism. The Village depicts the success of men like Edison, Ford, and Webster, as inextricably linked to a value system embedded in the homogeneity and virtuousness of the middle class.

In determining why people came to the Village, surveyors were particularly interested in discovering whether their patrons felt that the site's representation of the past was linked to efforts to celebrate Ford and his Motor Company. During the mid-1970s, surveyors began to ask patrons whether they knew that the Village and the Henry Ford Museum were not connected to the Ford Motor Company or the Ford Foundation (see Figure 3.9). This question is interesting for two reasons. First, this "question," is in fact information. Administrators must have known that most visitors were unaware that the Village and Museum were separate from the Ford Empire. This question, then, served as a small advertising campaign. Second, if visitors believed that the Village was linked to the Ford Motor Company or the Ford Foundation, then did they also view the village's representations of the past with the assumption that the site was biased? Did patrons approach the site as a museum, assuming that it was objective, or as at least part propaganda? Perhaps both narratives were present in the minds of some visitors. If visitors did make such an assumption, but chose to visit the site anyway, then it is even more likely that their trips were viewed as leisure activities. If they did come for historical information, or an educational experience, then it was grounded in a sense of cynicism, or at the very least skepticism. For those who assumed that the Village was a celebration of Ford and his accomplishments—and in many ways it is just that—their

Visitor Survey Responses to Question: Did you know that Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum are not connected to the Ford Motor Company or the Ford Foundation?

	Yes	Had not thought about it	No
1976 Spring	20%	20%	60%
1976 Summer	17%	33%	49%
1977 Spring	19%	31%	50%
1977 Summer	15%	34%	50%
1977 Fall	16%	74%	50%
1978 Spring	42%		57%
1978 Winter	33%		63%
1979 Spring	41%		56%
1979 Winter	46%		53%

Figure 3.9: Table based on answers to survey question “Did you know that Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum are not connected to the Ford Motor Company or the Ford Foundation?” “Visitor Survey 1976 Spring, 1976 Summer, 1977 Spring, 1977 Summer, and 1977 Fall,” Box 43, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford; “Visitor Survey, 1978 Spring, 1978 Winter, 1979 Spring, and 1979 Winter,” Box 45, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

historical focus was likely on the authenticity of the architecture rather than the authenticity of the historical narrative. Regardless, this question supports the assertion that the Village functioned both as historic site and as leisure space in the present.

The Bicentennial

America's Bicentennial came at just the right time. Two years after Watergate, in the midst of an economic downturn, and after America's exit from Vietnam and the dissolution of various social movements, America grasped at patriotic celebrations of the nation's past. David Lowenthal's analysis of the Bicentennial supports the notion that the Village's representation of the past could confirm a populist conservative worldview. A question associated with the Bicentennial also reflects how many patrons became, for a brief moment, specifically focused on locating and visiting places associated with America's heritage.

One year after the Bicentennial, David Lowenthal examined the celebration and argued that the verve with which Americans approached the celebration marked a shift in America's attitude toward the past.³⁷⁷ Long interested in segregating the past by placing artifacts and historical narratives inside museum walls, the Bicentennial made the past fashionable. But Lowenthal suggested that this interest was also largely ephemeral:

The new embrace of all this historical freight does not, however, mean that Americans are now historically minded. On the contrary, events and landscapes from the past become ever more like what we prefer the present to be. The authority of the past justifies every innovation in architecture and planning, in exterior design and interior décor.³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ David Lowenthal, "The Bicentennial Landscape: A Mirror Held Up to the Past," *The Geographical Review* 67, 253-267.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 257.

As one of the few outdoor museums for much of its history, the Village was in many ways unique. It was certainly a museum, but its past was not segregated from visitors. Rather, they were encouraged to interact with the past. Still, visitors to the Village could have easily fit Lowenthal's description of the average celebrator of America's Bicentennial. Certainly one could easily point out the historical inconsistencies about at the Village. Patrons could be historically engaged with the space, or not. Lowenthal's primary concern in this piece is that Americans do not distinguish between history and heritage. This chapter argues that what is more useful is that Lowenthal's piece explicates the ways in which depictions and celebrations of America's preindustrial past, particularly during the Bicentennial, became inextricably linked to populism. In his conclusion, Lowenthal writes that:

Revolutionary reconstructions and memorials often celebrate those aspects of life that, because we ourselves have lost them, we mistakenly suppose our forbears enjoyed. Yet the picture that Bicentennial celebrations convey is one of frugal but joyous lives filled with jolly pastimes. In this mythical past Americans realize the unachieved dreams of the present: green and smiling countrysides, unpolluted skies and waters, pure and wholesome food, inspired leadership, togetherness and cooperation. From the standpoint of today's failures, Americans are apt to rephrase the old prophetic piety: "I have seen the past, and it works."³⁷⁹

What Lowenthal describes here coheres with the political values of populism. The picture of the frugal, hard-working, and independent American who succeeds because of democratic capitalism is certainly present in the Village. What Lowenthal does not note, is that in 1976 many white Americans, and even some black Americans would argue that the nation's "failures" lay in efforts to integrate the nation's public spaces and schools, others would point to challenges to established gender roles, and still others would locate

³⁷⁹ Lowenthal, "The Bicentennial Landscape," 267.

the nation's problems in the city. Populist conservatism seemed to hold answers for many whites looking for a political solution.

Village administrators worked hard to prepare for the Bicentennial (see Figure 3.10). They knew that a renewed interest in patriotism and the nation's heritage offered a rare opportunity to increase visitation. During the 1975 Winter/1976 Spring survey visitors were asked to indicate whether they were making any specific travel plans to celebrate America's Bicentennial. In the Winter 1975/Spring 1976 survey 70% of respondents said yes. Their vacation plans were aimed at viewing a site associated or celebrating American heritage. This percentage declined by the summer of 1976, but it demonstrates that visitors to the Village during the Bicentennial were likely there for more patriotic reasons than at other times during the year. But in many ways Village administrators did not achieve their goal. The majority of patrons during the 1976 season were, in fact, repeat visitors. But if repeat visitors had been coming to the Village because of its value as a leisure space, the Bicentennial ensured that they paid more overt attention to the historical and educational aspects of their visits.

During the 1970s, American history was slowly but surely becoming part of the already burgeoning culture wars. For many Americans, the Bicentennial reawakened patriotic sentiment. It also marked the past as a battleground not only for those in the public history profession, but also politicians and lay citizens. At the Village, visitors were provided with visual evidence that implicitly supported populism. While the Village was tied to a specific political worldview, a new administration would attempt to alter its narrative and fit it into the New Social History paradigm. During the 1980s, the Village's inconsistencies and paradoxes would become increasingly palpable.



Figure 3.10: The “Let Freedom Ring” July 4th celebration during the Bicentennial. Macomb County was one of those whose residents’ political majority shifted from Democrat to Republican during the 1970s. Box 103, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

Conclusion

What were visitors to the Village seeking during this period? How does survey data explicate the popularity of the Village? Earlier, this chapter suggested that the answer to that question lies, at least in part, in the complex and contradictory motivations that influenced the preservation movement, which was guided by a simultaneously populist and traditionalist spirit. Between 1969 and 1979 some of the Village exhibits changed and new leisure activities were added. What remained constant, however, was the overall message of the Village, which was rooted in the ideology of the self-made businessman and the pastoral landscape. Certainly, self-made manhood can be viewed as a simultaneously progressive and traditional idea. As social movements became cultural movements, however, conventional ideologies that shaped myths and realities about white manhood and masculinity were challenged. In his book *Manhood in America*, Michael S. Kimmel writes that during the 1970s, white:

Men were besieged at home; the social movements... the women's movement, the civil rights movement, and the gay liberation movement—all offered scathing critiques of traditional masculinity and demanded inclusion and equality in the public arena. No longer could the marketplace and the political arena be the preserve of heterosexual white men. The very groups who had been so long excluded from American life were making their own claims for identity.³⁸⁰

At the Village, however, heterosexual white masculinity, in particular, the model of self-made manhood, long, Kimmel argues, the baseline for definitions of American manhood, continued to be celebrated. Economic turmoil, racial upheaval, and questions of gender roles and identity were absent inside the Village gates. The texture of the Village, its buildings, signage, and tours, communicated the idea that hard work, perseverance,

³⁸⁰ Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 179.

optimism, and invention, primarily by white men, and supported by cooperative women and the occasional black family had enabled Americans to control and shape their own and the nation's economic destiny. White men and women threatened by cultural, economic, and social shifts could find solace and reassurance inside the Village. More subtly, the Village landscape embodied the values and ideals of populism, a political ideology that was resurging amidst the counter-culture and social movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. In her study of Orange County "suburban warriors," Lisa McGirr argues that by the late 1960s:

The Right had made important political gains in both California and the nation. Ronald Reagan, an unabashed conservative ideologue, had won a resounding victory in his run for governor. Richard Nixon, a centrist Republican who courted the Republican Right, had become his party's presidential nominee and won the election through an embrace of a new middle-class conservatism, even while George Wallace, a law-and-order populist, had garnered 13.5 percent of the national vote on a third-party ticket. Building on new opportunities, the Right had refashioned itself, gaining new political respectability. As the last 1960s witnessed antiwar protests, a flourishing counterculture, and riots in the nation's inner cities, the conservative critique of liberalism resonated with an increasing number of Americans.³⁸¹

In fact, the Americans McGirr identifies were probably visiting the Village as well.

Although Wallace cannot be conflated with all of the New Right heroes, he was one of them, and some of his most ardent supporters could be found in the suburban enclaves and cities of metropolitan Detroit.

Matthew Lassiter's study of the Sunbelt South asks scholars to rethink the conservative backlash of the 1960s and 1970s by taking a "consciously suburban approach to the political landscape and the postwar metropolis."³⁸² He explains the need

³⁸¹ McGirr, 217.

³⁸² Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7.

for more studies examining the political culture of white-collar neighborhoods and the social movements of middle-class families that marked the “sprawling suburbs of postwar America.”³⁸³ By 1968, the Village was ingrained in the popular culture of white flight. The Village operated in a multiplicity of contexts, ones linked to, but in many ways beyond that of Ford. Because it represented a fictional place and a wide range of histories, including its own, the interstices of meaning at the Village are endless. The Village may have been built by Ford, but it was located in Dearborn, increasingly identified as a city and community defined by racial prejudice thanks to the Orville Hubbard political machine. Visitors, particularly Michigan whites who identified themselves as white collar or professional, and who supported conservative ideologies and politicians, likely viewed the site through the lens of the politics of metropolitan Detroit. Although it was certainly used for and interpreted in a wide range of more mundane ways, it also participated in and supported the populist conservatism that defined the metropolitan landscape.

The Village’s flexible historical narrative and new administrations with differing goals and interests however, ensured that the site’s meaning and representation could and can always be changed. In 1980, the Village appointed Harold K. Skramstad president. Skramstad would view the Village and its landscape with a different historical and political paradigm, one that reflected the values and goals of New History. The year before Skramstad was appointed president, Detroit hosted the Republican National Convention. The Museum and Village, along with other downtown and metropolitan area businesses, participated in yet another effort to improve the national reputation of Detroit.

³⁸³ Lassiter, 7.

The convention culminated with the announcement that Ronald Reagan would be the Republican Party's presidential candidate. The 1980s would also mark a renewed focus on defining what the nation's historical landscapes would look like and who they would represent. Village encounters, already rife with contradictory impulses, would soon be shaped by another layer of historical narrative, one grounded in an inclusive vision of the past, one that moved women, people of color, and the poor to the center of America's story.

CHAPTER FOUR

The New History at Ford's Village (1981-1995)

Republicans will rely on nostalgia to get American's attention during the opening night of the party's national convention next month in Detroit. Nostalgia, according to California Lt. Gov. Mike Curb, will be the device to hook television viewers and keep them watching right up to the grand finale -- the crowning of Ronald Reagan -- three nights later.³⁸⁴

The Washington Post, 1980

In 1980 the spheres of national politics and public representations of the past converged at the Village. Republican presidential hopefuls, including nominee Ronald Reagan, were welcomed to the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village as they toured the Detroit metro-area during the Republican National Convention. Reagan's populist rhetoric and positioning of himself as a rugged man of the people in many ways mirrored Ford's public image. The Village seemed a perfect setting for the Republican Party to promote the populist conservatism that had marked its politics since the late 1960s, and a distinctive opportunity for Detroit industries to combat the images of racial conflict and violence that had come to define the city. Reagan's nomination and eventual defeat of Democratic incumbent Jimmy Carter suggested a shift in many Americans' political beliefs. In Michigan and elsewhere, counties that had a long history of supporting the Democratic Party voted Republican. White blue-collar and middle-class voters were increasingly disenchanted with the Democratic Party as many of its politicians supported the pro-choice movement, affirmative action legislation, and the environmental movement.

³⁸⁴ "GOP Theme in Detroit is Grand Old Past," *The Washington Post*, June 27, 1980, Sect. A3.

One year later, however, the Village would begin an internal effort to alter its reputation and image in the museum world and in the eyes of the public. Harold K. Skramstad was elected president of the museum and Village. His educational training and approach to history embodied the paradigms and perspectives associated with New history and the liberal political agenda. Over the next ten years, Skramstad would spearhead an effort to reinterpret the objects at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village with these views in mind, seeking to add uncomfortable and traumatic histories to the museum and Village landscapes.

Reagan's and Skramstad's very different views and uses of American history are representative of the role that the past would play in the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s. Along with dramatic changes in legislation, participants in various social movements targeted museums, historic sites, and textbooks, which activists argued had long promoted an ethics of exclusion and established power structures. Some publics applauded challenges to well established historical narratives, but for others, these efforts were added to the long list of activities that conservatives used to define liberals as weak, "bleeding hearts," unwilling to accept harsh realities and the inherent unfairness of culture and society. Museum exhibits that offered alternative views of Indian Removal and the decision to drop the atomic bomb, for example, were dismissed as "politically correct" and decried as unpatriotic. At the Village, some of Skramstad's changes were met with resistance from audiences, particularly those that challenged patrons' use of the space as an alternative downtown and that sought to force a more educational encounter with the site. Still, many of these changes were readily accepted; by the early 1990s,

Skramstad had remapped the Village into new “areas” and added a working historical farm and an African American Cultures program.

What accounts for visitors’ various receptions and general acceptance of massive changes to the Village landscape and to its interpretation? The administration’s “new curriculum” for the Village worked to challenge the site’s populist conservative narrative by emphasizing the history of relationships and systems. This chapter will show that new interpretations of the past, despite their progressive content, could also have been read as supportive of populism and the nostalgia for “what might have been.” Furthermore, the specter of Dearborn, whose residents continued to support policies that kept the metro-area black community out of the city’s public spaces, embedded the Village in a landscape of white flight and racism. Changing representations of the past, reactions to those alterations, and analysis of the political landscape of Detroit—increasingly divided between a liberal Democratic urban core surrounded by conservative Republican suburban enclaves—offers a microcosmic view of the ways in which history would become contested ground in the 1980s and 1990s.

Culture Wars/History Wars

During the 1980s, history became an important frontline in the culture wars. Academic approaches that argued for multiculturalism found their way into public representations of the past. This was particularly evident in the establishment of new historic preservation programs and in progressive museum exhibitions. Simultaneously, the rise of neo-conservatism ensured that this new vision of the American historic

landscape was challenged. President Reagan was particularly adept at articulating this opposing view by invoking monuments and historical symbols in his political rhetoric. Michael Wallace explains that Reagan positioned himself in direct opposition to “professional historians” who had “overturned much of the established wisdom of the 1940s and 1950s” by challenging historical narratives that ignored the pasts of women, the poor, and people of color.³⁸⁵ Reagan cast liberal intellectuals as negative curmudgeons who refused to accept positive portrayals of America. Despite such challenges from the right, however, many public history professionals succeeded in their efforts to add stories of oppression to well-established historical narratives.

A Multicultural Main Street?

In 1981, the American preservation movement enjoyed unprecedented success. Rehabilitation tax credits made preservation popular with groups long opposed to the cause. These tax credits also suggested that preservationists would be forever linked to the values and goals of big business as billions of dollars were funneled into adaptive reuse projects.³⁸⁶ As Wallace notes, however, the preservation movement suffered a series of setbacks as the 1980s progressed. In 1986, Republican conservatives joined Democratic liberals in altering the tax code, effectively eliminating rehabilitation credits. Credits remained for rehabilitating historic buildings, but even these were reduced from

³⁸⁵ Michael Wallace, “Ronald Reagan and the Politics of History,” in Michael Wallace, ed., *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 253.

³⁸⁶ Michael Wallace, “Preservation Revisited,” 224.

25% to 20%.³⁸⁷ Amidst the recession, the savings and loan scandal, and the decline in the real estate market, preservation projects declined.

During the 1990s, preservationists' gains were also challenged by individuals and groups who argued that preservation law conflicted with property rights guaranteed by the constitution. Although preservation law withstood challenges to landmark legislation such as the 1978 Penn Central decision, historic district legislation proved vulnerable. Politicians, business owners, and homeowners had long been ardent supporters of land use legislation because they generated tax revenue, profits, and improved property values. But during the early 1990s, small property owners argued against preservation restrictions. As Wallace explains, the new emphasis on "authentic" rehabilitation smacked of "political correctness" to many.³⁸⁸ Preservationists influenced by shifts in higher education argued for broader definitions of what counted as "history," but proposals aimed at preserving buildings and homes that didn't "look" historic were often met with strong opposition.³⁸⁹ In 1992, for example, Virginia passed a law allowing property owners to veto designation of historic properties listed in the Virginia Landmarks Register and in 1995, Oregon legislation declared that local governments could allow property owners to refuse efforts to designate their property as historic.³⁹⁰

The National Trust for Historic Preservation also came under siege during the 1990s. In 1991, it scripted a new mission statement and pledged to "foster an appreciation of the diverse character and meaning of our American culture heritage and to preserve and revitalize the livability of our communities by leading the nation in saving America's

³⁸⁷ Wallace, "Preservation Revisited," 224.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 227.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

historic environments.”³⁹¹ Wallace writes that this “manifesto embraced three distinct but overlapping claims: Preservation could promote multicultural comity, help revive wounded inner cities, and partner the ecological movement.”³⁹² The mission statement echoes the methods and paradigms adopted by historians in the 1970s and identified preservationists as targets for neo-conservatives. Despite an increase in federal funding during the Bush and Clinton administrations, Wallace notes, the Trust could not save many state staffs. And in 1995, the House, dominated by Republicans, decreed a two year “glide path” to extinction for the Trust. Although this was increased to five years with pressure from the Senate, it was clear that the Republican Party no longer supported the Trust’s goals. Despite these losses, support for preservation amongst many ordinary citizens continued to grow. Between 1987 and 1994—when preservationists engaged in some of their most experimental approaches to date—the National Trust’s membership rose from 197,000 to 250,000.³⁹³ In many ways, the changing approach of the National Trust reflected the growing interest of academicians in public history projects.

Dolores Hayden’s “Power of Place” project in East Los Angeles exemplifies the ways in which scholars joined the historic preservation movement. In 1984 Hayden launched a small nonprofit corporation with the goal of representing women’s and ethnic history in Los Angeles’s urban spaces through collaboration between historians, designers, and artists.³⁹⁴ Hayden soon discovered that preservation projects were most successful when they served the historical needs of local communities. Drawing on oral histories and local historical memories, Hayden and her colleagues identified the

³⁹¹ Wallace, “Preservation Revisited,” 230.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 230-31.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 237.

³⁹⁴ Hayden, xi.

narratives that continued to play an important role in the lives of the community and then located structures, or created new ones using public art, which could tell these stories.³⁹⁵

Reinventing History Museums

The preservation movement was just one arena in which America's representations of the past shifted during the 1980s and 1990s. Shifts in the academy also affected the historic landscape. During the 1970s and 1980s, many scholars, particularly historians, began to advocate for a "New History." As explained by Peter Burke, the phrase "the new history" is best known in France and comes from *La nouvelle histoire*, the title of a collection of essays edited by medievalist Jacques Le Goff.³⁹⁶ Le Goff also helped edit a three-volume collection of essays, that detailed "new problems," "new approaches," and "new objects," in historical studies. Le Goff and others practiced a new approach to history that is best summarized, in many ways, by what it is not. Burke explains that the new history is "history written in deliberate reaction against the traditional 'paradigm.'"³⁹⁷ In the traditional paradigm, history is essentially, Burke writes, concerned with politics, while the new history is concerned with "virtually every human activity."³⁹⁸ New history also emphasizes the social and cultural construction of reality; everything is relative. While traditional historians consider history as a narrative of events, new history focuses on the analysis of structures. New history also argues against a view from above, or a focus on great men, statesmen, generals, or churchmen. Rather,

³⁹⁵ Hayden.

³⁹⁶ Peter Burke, "Overture: the New History, its Past and its Future," in Peter Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 2.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

new historians focus on history from below. Thus the study of popular culture is viewed as equally valid and important according to new historians. New historians also argue for a broader definition of evidence, claiming that written documents are not the only source of historical information. In further contrast to traditional history, new history examines power relationships, trends, and collective movements in tandem with individual actions and motivations. And finally, as Burke articulates, new historians recognize their own subjectivity.³⁹⁹

As men and women trained in the theories and practice of new history chose career paths outside of the academy, they also altered the interpretive scripts and displays at history museums. In some cases, they participated in the construction of museums that represented traumatic national and international pasts. In decades past, these kinds of institutions were unimaginable. Such museums were not, however, created without struggle and often marked academics engaged in public history work as unpatriotic and anti-American. If the messages sent by museum exhibits “tainted” by academia were controversial, however, their methods heralded new and exciting approaches to representing the past. The construction of the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum, the Smithsonian’s Enola Gay exhibit, and Colonial Williamsburg’s decision to reenact a slave auction provide a useful context in which to consider the changing shape and texture of museum exhibits and they explicate many of the new approaches used by administration and staff at the Village. Finally, a discussion of other controversial museums and exhibits demonstrates the boundaries of acceptance. Many Americans were ready to encounter the politics of the past, but only in specific contexts and cases.

³⁹⁹ Burke, 3-6.

In 1978 President Jimmy Carter issued Executive Order 12093 which created the President's Commission on the Holocaust; in 1985 official groundbreaking for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. took place.⁴⁰⁰ Why would such a museum find such widespread political support in the late 1970s and into the neoconservative climate of the 1980s? In his history of the creation of the museum, Edward T. Linenthal suggests that the Holocaust became a central narrative in America's historical memory for several reasons. For Linenthal, the most important event in resurrecting Holocaust imagery was the Six-Day War in 1967.⁴⁰¹ But the Vietnam War, too, raised Holocaust awareness as university students questioned America's actions. According to Linenthal, "the Holocaust provided people an example of evil seemingly unlike any other, against which this nation's—or any nation's—actions could be measured." In 1978, the threatened march by Chicago-based American Nazis in Skokie, Illinois again brought the Holocaust to national attention.⁴⁰² And finally, Linenthal points to the 1978 NBC mini-series entitled *The Holocaust*, which had an audience of approximately 120 million.⁴⁰³

Why, though, was the proposed construction of a museum aimed at representing a traumatic past so widely accepted in the 1980s, when neo-conservatism thrived? Reagan certainly decried focusing on Holocaust memory. During a speech in Bitburg, Germany, Reagan argued that Nazism was "one man's totalitarian dictatorship" and the Waffen SS entombed there "were victims, just as surely as the victims in the concentration

⁴⁰⁰ Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 23 and 57.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12.

camps.”⁴⁰⁴ Reagan argued for a historical view of the Holocaust that placed blame on Adolf Hitler and absolved the German people, a perspective that suggested a museum or historical site commemorating the Holocaust was either unnecessary, or that there was no lesson to learn from the Holocaust.

Certainly, many conservatives and even some progressive Americans did not support the construction of a Holocaust museum for a variety of reasons. Some argued against the site because the Holocaust did not occur on American soil. Such a museum disrupted conventional notions about the role of commemoration. Others, even those on the museum commission, argued for placing the museum in New York, where a large percentage of American Jews resided and where many Holocaust survivors made a new life after World War II. New York, not the national mall, was viewed as the appropriate location for Holocaust memory. But many Americans supported the museum and its placement on the national mall. As Linenthal explains, America’s place in many Holocaust narratives is appealing because these historical memories identify the United States as hero and as other. Americans liberated the concentration camp victims, and America’s democratic government stands in direct opposition to the evils of Nazism. In the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, university students were not the only ones looking for answers; many Americans were hungry for histories that reassured Americans of their exceptionalism. The commission would debate America’s place in Holocaust memory, eventually portraying the United States’ role as liberator, complicit bystander, and participant. The museum features an exhibit on, for example, the SS *St. Louis*, whose Jewish passengers were prevented from debarking in 1939, resulting in many of their

⁴⁰⁴ As qtd. in Wallace, “Ronald Reagan and the Politics of History,” 251.

deaths during the Holocaust. For many, however, the Holocaust narrative remains supportive of a positive portrayal of the United States.

Carter's order epitomized the dramatic shifts that were occurring in America's historical consciousness during this period. The decision to create a museum documenting trauma was groundbreaking. The Holocaust museum would make demands for more representations of traumas that took place on American soil, difficult to ignore. Further, as the museum became a reality, the representational issues with which the commission grappled set the stage for debates in other museums aiming to add traumatic and painful pasts to their sites. One of the core struggles, for example, was the desire to personalize Holocaust memory. As Linenthal explains, throughout the design and construction of the museum:

there was concern that the millions of individual deaths that made up the Holocaust would be lost in a story of mass death and overwhelmed by a fascination with the technique of destruction. The design team was determined to personalize the Holocaust, since it wanted visitors to eschew forever the role of bystander, and this, it was felt, could be accomplished effectively through a painful link with the faces of Holocaust victims.⁴⁰⁵

Some solutions to this issue were to include photographs in the exhibitions. Yaffa Eliach's tower exhibition, for example, included photographs of the Jewish shtetl, Ejszyski in Lithuania. Eliach said that her tower was an effort to ensure that "these Jews would not be remembered only as victims."⁴⁰⁶ Other historians representing painful pasts would also be compelled to balance broad historical narratives with personal stories as a means of demonstrating the ways in which oppressed peoples possess agency. In fact, "personalization" would become a key tool used by outdoor history museums engaged in

⁴⁰⁵ Linenthal, *Preserving Memory*, 171.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

representing histories of enslavement. When the Holocaust museum opened, it was immediately well received. Since opening in 1993, it has welcomed over 25 million visitors.⁴⁰⁷ Other efforts by museums to represent a past that recognized varying historical perspectives were not as well received, particularly when they directly challenged American exceptionalism.

During the early 1990s, the Smithsonian Institution, perhaps the most popular museum in the nation, began to create exhibitions which considered the politics of history. In 1991, scholars and museum curators joined forces to create the exhibit “The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920,” at the National Museum of American Art. The exhibition combined well-known American paintings with walls of extensive text. Wall texts were used to identify the ways in which some 19th-century American artists promoted the idea of Manifest Destiny and racism.⁴⁰⁸ The exhibition drew mixed reactions from the public, but there was enough outcry from audiences to cause Republican Senators Ted Stevens of Alaska and Slade Gordon of Washington to accuse the Smithsonian of advancing a liberal-leaning political agenda.⁴⁰⁹ The responses to this exhibition from the scholarly community and some publics typified the rhetoric that would draw battle lines between liberal, academic views of history and longstanding myths about the American past. Perhaps the starkest example of the ways in which history became a front in the culture wars, however, is the reception and eventual alteration of the Smithsonian’s Enola Gay exhibit.

⁴⁰⁷ “About the Museum.” *United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum*, Oct. 25 2006, <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/mission/2006>.

⁴⁰⁸ Michael Kimmelman, “Art View: Old West, New Twist at the Smithsonian,” *The New York Times*, May 26, 1991, <http://www.lexisnexisacademic.com>.

⁴⁰⁹ Carol Innerst, “Smithsonian Exhibit on Old West Draws Little Heat from Academics,” *New York Times*, June 13, 1991, <http://www.lexisnexisacademic.com>.

In 1994, one year after the Holocaust Memorial and Museum opened, veterans groups and politicians began a campaign to alter the planned exhibition commemorating the 50th anniversary of the United States' decision to drop two atomic bombs on Hiroshima, Japan.⁴¹⁰ The exhibit, which was to be displayed at the National Air and Space Museum, would feature the Enola Gay, the B-29 that dropped the bomb. Michael Neufeld told reporter Ken Ringle that while the Enola Gay symbolized the end of World War II for many veterans, for those 80,000 to 140,000 Japanese killed and for the postwar generation, the plane held different meanings. We "grew up cowering under the bedclothes expecting World War III to drop on us any minute, and thinking 'Oh, God, it's going to happen to us and be 50,000 times worse.'"⁴¹¹

Neufeld's controversial script, written in February 1993, claimed that it would "address the significance, necessity and morality of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki."⁴¹² The proposal continued by arguing that "The question of whether it was necessary and right to drop the bombs ... continues to perplex us."⁴¹³ Edward T. Linenthal, who served on an advisory committee for the museum's planned exhibit writes that the initial script consisted of five parts and over 300 pages of text. The first part, "A Fight to the Finish," featured photos of cheering European crowds and liberated concentration camp victims celebrating the end of war on the European front.⁴¹⁴ It then transitioned to a discussion of the war with Japan, noting that the decision to drop the bomb has long been debated. It also noted that "Japanese expansionism was marked by

⁴¹⁰ Ken Ringle, "2 Views of History Collide Over Smithsonian A-Bomb Exhibit," *Washington Post*, September 26, 1994, <http://www.lexisnexisacademic.com>.

⁴¹¹ As qtd. in Ringle.

⁴¹² As qtd. in Ringle.

⁴¹³ As qtd. in Ringle.

⁴¹⁴ Edward T. Linenthal, "Anatomy of a Controversy," *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past*, Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, Eds. (New York: Owl Books, 1996), 29.

naked aggression and extreme brutality.”⁴¹⁵ The second part, “The Decision to Drop the Bomb” outlined the history of the building of the bomb and contemplated alternative outcomes available to the U.S. military.⁴¹⁶ It also raised a series of longstanding historical questions surrounding the decision. The third section was titled “Delivering the Bomb” and offered visitors the chance to encounter the Enola Gay and a casing from a uranium atomic bomb.⁴¹⁷ It also documented the, “organizational genius,” of Colonel Paul Tibbets who created and commanded the almost two-thousand soldiers in the 509th Composite Group who performed the mission.⁴¹⁸ The fourth section, “Ground Zero,” was perhaps the most controversial section. In this section, the aftermath of the bomb was personalized as plans suggested that visitors be exposed to artifacts and photographs representing the bomb’s destruction.⁴¹⁹ Objects included a school-child’s uniform, coins, and a half-destroyed image of the Buddha, and photographs documented the dead, dying, and wounded.⁴²⁰ Finally, the fifth section, “The Legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki,” asked patrons to contemplate the connections between the atomic bomb and the ensuing Cold War and nuclear arms race.⁴²¹

Although Martin Harwit, director of NASM, believed that he was effectively communicating the plans for the exhibit to various constituencies in the military, it soon became clear that many disputed the proposed script. In 1993, the Air Force Association began a grass-roots campaign to alter the exhibition. By 1994, the Enola Gay exhibit had been denounced as “partisan,” “left-wing,” “anti-American,” “politically correct” and

⁴¹⁵ Linenthal, 30.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 31.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 32.

“historical revisionism at its worst.”⁴²² A *Wall Street Journal* editorial used the Smithsonian exhibit to draw explicit battle lines between academics and the public. “What can't be altered,” the editorial explained “is the clear impression given by the Smithsonian that the American museum whose business it is to tell the nation's story is now in the hands of academics unable to view American history as anything other than a woeful catalogue of crimes and aggressions against the helpless peoples of the earth.”⁴²³ One week later, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution by Senator Nancy Kassebaum, a Republican from Kansas, which stated that despite concessions by the Smithsonian to revise its initial script, the exhibit remained “revisionist, unbalanced and offensive” and reminded museum that it was obligated “to portray history in the proper context of the time.”⁴²⁴

Harwit responded by engaging in a series of negotiations between the Smithsonian, veterans groups, and congressional leaders. The script and display plans were revised numerous times, and in each revision a pared down, less controversial narrative emerged. Late in 1994, scholars finally responded in an effort to establish first and foremost that the decision to drop the bomb had a long history of controversy not only in academic circles, but also in the broader public; that in fact, the Smithsonian's exhibit was in many ways, nothing new. On November 16, forty historians signed a letter addressed to Smithsonian Secretary I. Martin Heyman arguing that the script was being historically cleansed. “It is,” they wrote:

⁴²² Ringle.

⁴²³ “Review and Outlook: War and the Smithsonian,” *Wall Street Journal*, 29 August, 1994, <http://lexisnexisacademic.com>.

⁴²⁴ As qtd. in Ringle.

unconscionable first, that as a result of pressures from outside the museum, the exhibit will no longer attempt to present a balanced range of historical scholarship on the issue; second that a large body of important archival evidence on the Hiroshima decision will not even be mentioned; and third, that the exhibit will contain assertions of fact which have long been challenged by careful historical scholarship.⁴²⁵

Objections from scholars, however, carried little weight; congressmen and women held the Smithsonian's purse strings, and were threatening budgetary cuts.⁴²⁶ On January 30, 1995, the Enola Gay fuselage was put on display.⁴²⁷ Interpretive information in the form of text, video, and photographs focused almost solely on the mission.⁴²⁸ The plane was trapped in the moment it dropped the bomb, placed in little context, and subsequently, uncontroversial.

The failure of the Enola Gay exhibit indicated that even at the federal level, the majority, which continued to be largely comprised of those with conservative ideologies, ruled. Still, the successes of museum professionals who joined with academics during the early 1990s were remarkable. Their most lasting contribution was the addition of alternative methods of representation. The personalization of representations of the traumatic past would become increasingly popular, particularly as outdoor history museums worked to add the stories of African Americans. Village administrators and staff would similarly struggle to balance a broad historical narrative with personalized stories of the African American past at their site during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

⁴²⁵ Linenthal, "Anatomy of a Controversy," 52.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 53-62.

⁴²⁷ "Enola Gay: Former Exhibition Information," Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, http://www.nasm.si.edu/exhibitions/gal103/gal103_former.html.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

Living History, Outdoor Museums, and the African American Past

Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, living history and outdoor museums continued to add interpretive scripts and material culture associated with women and the poor. Perhaps the most complicated and controversial additions, however, were depictions of enslaved African Americans. While many representations consisted primarily of adding material objects and buildings—such as slave cabins—to historic sites, others used living history to communicate messages about race and injustice. Many of these efforts were met with criticism, not only from audiences, but from African American communities. Some contended that the representation of enslavement trivialized it. Even performers of this past often found it difficult. Despite its potential to raise consciousnesses, living history, particularly when conducted in first-person, asked professional black men and women to pretend to be slaves. These problems raised new questions for public historians about how best to translate histories and pasts of those long excluded to the public landscape. For the purposes of this project, however, these efforts in various large and small museums throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s are explored to demonstrate the ways in which New history found its way into museums that had long represented an American past that was patriotic, reassuring, and uncritical. Further, the issues they raised would shape how the Village articulated African American life.

During the late 1980s, James Oliver Horton and Spencer R. Crew sought to ascertain how the civil rights and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s had altered the representation of African Americans at living history museums, historic houses, and

historic sites. They did so by sending a questionnaire to 104 museums selected from lists provided by the American Association of Museums and the African American Museums Association.⁴²⁹ Their sample targeted both publicly and privately sponsored museums in various regions and of differing size. While some museums made African American history their primary focus, others concentrated on more general American histories. They had a return rate of more than 50%. As part of their survey, Horton and Crew asked museum staff to report on the percentage of “minority” visitors to their sites. Most museums, they noted reported that almost 30% of their visitors were minorities and of those, 47% were black.⁴³⁰ They also commented that “museums near black communities reported the highest rate of black visitorship.”⁴³¹

In assessing the interpretive and representational shifts at the surveyed museums, Horton and Crew found that some inroads had been made but that much was missing in the way of black history from these museums. Museums that succeeded, they argued, had long-range planning, community coordination, included scholars with knowledge of social and black history, and a “determined staff effort supported at top administrative levels.”⁴³² Some specific success stories included the National Museum of American History exhibit entitled “Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration 1915-1940” which used photographs and interviews with migrants to discuss the black migration experience.⁴³³ Living history also provided numerous opportunities for successful inclusion of the black experience. In 1983, for example, the National Museum of

⁴²⁹ James Oliver Horton and Spencer R. Crew, “Afro-Americans and Museums,” in Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 216.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 227.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 227.

American History dramatized a dispute between a slave master and a slave on a pre-Civil War plantation. But viewers responded with uncertainty, particularly to the notion that a black man would play the role of an enslaved person. Horton and Crew explained that there “are important complications involved in the use of living history, especially in the reenactment of human conflict.”⁴³⁴ The mid-1980s saw the implementation of programs focusing on issues of enslavement and racism at Old Sturbridge Village, too. In 1985, museum staff and actors recreated a public meeting in which an interpreter portraying abolitionist Abigail Kelley raised the issue of slavery. Although no black actors were involved in the presentation, visitors did encounter a discussion of enslavement and its historical context.⁴³⁵

In many museums, alternative forms of representation were used to capture and represent a past long excluded from traditional historical narratives. During the 1980s, at Freetown Village in Indianapolis, Indiana, a theatrical troupe dressed in late-nineteenth-century costumes conducted hands-on craft workshops in candle making, butter churning, ice cream making and printing.⁴³⁶ Special events included a Juneteenth celebration of emancipation and a black wedding ceremony.⁴³⁷ Among topics of discussion were slavery, racial injustice, and the optimism of many in the Indiana black community during the immediate aftermath of the Civil War.⁴³⁸

Perhaps one of the most publicized efforts to reinvent a museum, however, took place at Colonial Williamsburg. New social historians had been hired at Colonial

⁴³⁴ Horton, 229.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

Williamsburg as early as the late 1960s, and by the early 1980s, many of their programs were in place. Restoration of the site focused on implementing a broader approach to African American history and, as Anders Greenspan explains, escaping its “pristine presentation of the past.”⁴³⁹ Restorers used whitewash instead of paint to create a more realistic cover on the surfaces of buildings, laundries, and stables.⁴⁴⁰ Rex Ellis spearheaded the implementation of the Black History Program and initiated the “Other Half Tour,” which represented the life of enslavement.⁴⁴¹ Black men and women had accounted for almost half of Williamsburg’s population in the late eighteenth century.⁴⁴² And there was a new emphasis on representing the lives of the white working class. In 1978, Zora Martin Felton had criticized the site’s missing histories of the town’s black residences. When she returned in 1984, she found that Williamsburg had since implemented a living-history project in which black and white actors used first-person narration to represent enslavement.⁴⁴³ The actors were so convincing, in fact, that one visitor left the site and reported to local authorities that blacks were being held captive at Colonial Williamsburg.⁴⁴⁴ The problem was mediated by ensuring that the interpreters introduced their performances, and followed it by answering questions and providing visitors with historical context.⁴⁴⁵

By the early 1990s, the African American interpretation and presentations program at Colonial Williamsburg employed fifteen black interpreters. In his history of

⁴³⁹ Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg*, (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2002), 154. See also Handler and Gable, 60-70 for a discussion of how new history paradigms altered the interpretation of the past at Colonial Williamsburg.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

the site, Greenspan explains that while this number “fell far short of adequately representing the 52% of the town’s colonial population that was of African descent... their presence was a major improvement.” Further, although only about “5 percent of the restoration’s visitors were black, the African American interpretation program attracted people of color who previously had not come to Colonial Williamsburg.”⁴⁴⁶

The political questions that new African American interpretive programs would raise culminated when Colonial Williamsburg pushed the living history approach to extremes. In 1994, interpreters and administrators at the site formed plans to re-enact a slave auction on October 10. The auction was part of a 3-day special program entitled “Publick Times,” designed to recreate life in Colonial Williamsburg as it really was. As word spread of the site’s plans, various groups expressed concern and dismay. Interestingly, it was the African American community who initially raised concern. Many called Virginia’s branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. According to Salim Khalfani, callers said that slavery was a wrenching chapter in black history they simply didn’t want to see rehashed.⁴⁴⁷ An African American man laying bricks in a driveway across from the office of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation told reporter Michael Janofsky that, “blacks around here don’t want to be reminded.”⁴⁴⁸

Christy S. Coleman, the interpretive program’s director, who also played an enslaved woman at the auction, defended the auction by arguing that it was “just the

⁴⁴⁶ Greenspan, 163.

⁴⁴⁷ Michael Janofsky, “Mock Auction of Slaves: Education or Outrage,” *The New York Times*, 8 October, 1994.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

natural progression of what we've been doing.”⁴⁴⁹ She continued by saying that despite the emotional nature of the issue, it is also “real history, and it distresses me, personally and professionally, that there are those who would have us hide this or keep it under the rug.”⁴⁵⁰ For Coleman and supporters, the event offered the opportunity to personalize the trauma of slavery, a primary goal of new history.

On the day of the auction, 2,000 supporters, 3 quarters of whom were white, populated the Duke of Gloucester Street.⁴⁵¹ Before the auction opened at Weatherburn’s Tavern, six demonstrators pushed through the audience singing “We Shall Overcome.”⁴⁵² Costumed employees, armed with canes and umbrellas, tried to push demonstrators behind the ropes as Jack Gravely, political director of the Virginia branch N.A.A.C.P. protested, “You cannot portray our history in 21 minutes and make it some sideshow.”⁴⁵³ Spectators booed the protestors and Coleman grabbed a microphone. “You all are going to watch,” she said, “I want you to judge with honest hearts and honest minds.”⁴⁵⁴ At this point two of the protestors sat down on the steps and challenged officials to call police. They were allowed to remain and the show began.

As the performance opened, visitors were transported back into 1773 and surprisingly, even Gravely was moved. Four enslaved peoples were placed on the auction block. Sukey, a washerwoman, was bought by her black husband. Billy, a carpenter was sold first for 67 pounds sterling. Lucy, a pregnant house servant and Daniel, another house servant, were also sold. Explaining why he changed his mind Gravely said, “Pain

⁴⁴⁹ Janofsky.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ “Tears and Protest at Mock Slave Sale,” *The New York Times*, October 11, 1994, <http://www.lexisnexisacademic.com>.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

had a face, indignity had a body, suffering had tears.”⁴⁵⁵ Claude L. Gilmer, a brewery machinist and African American said that he came because he attaches “a certain reverence.” He continued by saying that “it’s a period we’re paying for dearly, to this day.”⁴⁵⁶

Despite such acclaimed attempts to represent enslavement, the site continued to be criticized for its portrayal of the past. In 1994 Eric Gable and Richard Handler published their ethnographic study of Colonial Williamsburg, arguing that the professional historian’s scripts focused on “the facts,” ultimately preventing frontline interpreters from engaging in meaningful and spontaneous dialogue with patrons. Ada Huxtable criticized the museum because its sanitized version of American architecture had paved “the way for the new world order of Walt Disney Enterprises.”⁴⁵⁷

Like Colonial Williamsburg, the Village would hire an academic by training to reshape the site’s interpretive program. The Village, too, would experiment with representing enslavement, trying to find a middle-way that satisfied the rigors of scholarship and the desires of patrons. At the Village, the visitor population continued to be comprised primarily of metro-area and state residents. The following section considers the political climate of the Detroit metro-area arguing that visitor reception is better understood through a consideration of the local historical memories that marked the site’s surrounding landscape and shaped how patrons conceived of Dearborn and in turn, the Village.

⁴⁵⁵ “Tears and Protest.”

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion* (New York: New York Press, 1997), 41.

“Hostile Suburbs”: The Detroit Metro-Area (1980-1996)

Between 1980 and 1996 not only downtown, but the metro-area was shaped by the continued decline of auto sales and racial conflict. In this divided urban landscape, the Village operated as one of the more successful public spaces, despite a decline in attendance rates during the early 1980s. Although Mayor Hubbard retired in 1978, his legacy of racism had marked Dearborn as a hostile locale for minorities, and in the early 1980s a law prohibiting anyone outside of Dearborn from using the city’s public parks seemed to solidify his legacy. As late as the mid-1990s, Detroit’s black community continued to view Dearborn as an “unfriendly” city. A discussion of changes in the metro-area landscape and in perceptions of space among white and black residents offers a useful point of departure for a discussion of the Village during Skramstad’s presidency.

After winning the presidential nomination, Reagan was described by Detroit Mayor Coleman Young as “Old Pruneface.” But Reagan’s message was embraced by many in the metro-area long loyal to the Democratic Party, as evidenced by Macomb County, where a majority of longtime unionists cast their votes for Reagan. Many unionists and auto-workers blamed Jimmy Carter for the oil embargos and subsequent decline in automobile sales. Further, Reagan’s anti affirmative action stance appealed to white unionists who increasingly blamed Democratic politicians who they believed had abandoned them in favor of women and people of color. Reagan was not, however, the auto industry’s savior. Between 1978 and 1998 automobile industry employment declined sharply from 242,842 to 99,847.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁸ Gavrilovich 162.

Downtown Detroit continued to be marked by violence, despite numerous efforts to usher in a new era for the city, one which marked it as a space that welcomed the public. Even events that were clear opportunities for the city to unite often failed. In 1984, the Tigers won the World Series in five games defeating the San Diego Padres, but instead of celebration, the win was followed by civil unrest as looters torched and overturned police cars.⁴⁵⁹ Two years later, when proposals were made to impose stiffer gun control measures. Mayor Young argued that he would “be damned if” he was “going to let them collect guns... while we're surrounded by hostile suburbs.”⁴⁶⁰ Young said his assertion was based on recent actions by surrounding suburban governments and on sociologist Reynold Farley’s findings that Detroit and Chicago had the most racially segregated populations in the nation.⁴⁶¹ Among the list of offending suburbs was Dearborn which, according to Young’s press secretary Bob Berg, had a “reputation for being a whites-only enclave,” and in 1986, “fought an unsuccessful battle to keep nonresidents out of its public parks.”⁴⁶² The battle over Dearborn’s public parks explicates the ways in which the politics of space and the past continued to shape views of Dearborn and subsequently, the Village.

In November of 1985, Dearborn passed an ordinance which banned non-residents from most of the city’s parks and playgrounds with the exception of Ford Field, the Civic

⁴⁵⁹ “Violence Mars City’s Celebration: Police Car Burned; One Dead; 24 Arrested,” *The Washington Post*, October 15, 1984, <http://www.lexisnexisacademic.com>.

⁴⁶⁰ Isabel Wilkerson, “After Four Terms, Us Versus Them Still Plays in Detroit,” *The New York Times*, September 17, 1984, <http://www.lexisnexisacademic.com>.

⁴⁶¹ Bill McAllister, “Detroit’s ‘Hostile Suburbs;’ Young Cites Study, Government Actions,” *The Washington Post*, December, 4 1986, <http://www.lexisnexisacademic.com>.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

Center, and the Town Hall.⁴⁶³ Violators would face fines of up to \$500 and 90 days in jail.⁴⁶⁴ The Detroit branch of the NAACP challenged the constitutionality of the parks ordinance and charged that Dearborn public officials and police officers had a history of discrimination against the black community.⁴⁶⁵ Mayor John O'Reilly initially agreed to sign a consent order drafted and approved by the Dearborn City Council that would postpone the ordinance pending a court ruling, but later reneged.⁴⁶⁶ Doyne Jackson, the city's public information officer, explained that the mayor refused because the NAACP had "lost sight of what we agreed to."⁴⁶⁷ He continued, "They want to put Dearborn on trial for their version of past sins in the areas of civil rights and race relations."⁴⁶⁸ The NAACP then called for a boycott of all Dearborn merchants.⁴⁶⁹ A community leader later explained why the NAACP targeted merchants to reporter Susan Watson. Watson noted that the leader said that the issue became "greater than being able to go into a park."⁴⁷⁰ Watson continued, "the issue focused on Detroiters being forced to leave the city to shop, but were denied access to most parks in Dearborn, which contains a major shopping mall [Fairlane Mall]."⁴⁷¹ Even before Hudson's—the city's largest department store—closed there were talks of the need for a shopping mall downtown, but such plans threatened the high revenues of suburban malls, and developers refused to commit.⁴⁷² Accordingly,

⁴⁶³ Judy Diebolt, "Store Boycott of Dearborn for Park Law Resurrected," *The Detroit Free Press*, December 21, 1986, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ Susan Watson, "Detroit Mall Proposal Snags/Negotiations on Boycott of Dearborn," *The Detroit Free Press*, February 2, 1986, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*

black residents of the downtown area were forced to commute not only to work, but to meet their shopping needs. Although many black metro-area residents were pumping millions of dollars into the hands of suburban Detroit's merchants, they would be prevented from using the local parks in these areas.

Dearborn elected Michael Guido mayor in 1986, and there were hints that he might agree to the NAACP's request for an injunction. An agreement had been aggressively pursued by New Detroit Inc. Chairman S. Martin Taylor after the NAACP's boycott against Dearborn merchants proved effective. Guido said that he would not cooperate, however, if the lawsuit continued to include allegations of the city's past policies of racial discrimination. Guido told reporter Wylie Gerdes that "What I read in there are about two sentences on the parks ordinance and four pages on Dearborn's reputation and history."⁴⁷³

In fact, the history of Dearborn's racism became the key sticking point in the city's refusal to collaborate with the NAACP. Dearborn City Attorney William Hultgren claimed that Dearborn would agree to cooperate in a court test of the parks ordinance, and would sign the NAACP's lawsuit if they removed the sections that tied the ordinance to the city's past.⁴⁷⁴ Hultgren pointed specifically to two sections. One allegation read:

Historically, continuing to the present time, the City of Dearborn has maintained itself as a virtually all-white city... Throughout the years, public officials of the City of Dearborn have publicly stated that blacks were not welcome to reside in Dearborn, and at various times acts of violence were committed against black persons attempting to reside in the City of Dearborn.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷³ Wylie Gerdes, "Dearborn Mayor Wants to Negotiate on Parks," *The Detroit Free Press*, January 8, 1986, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁴⁷⁴ Wylie Gerdes, "City Wants Court Ruling on Law, Not History," *The Detroit Free Press*, January 21, 1986, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

And another claimed:

During the election campaign, the proponents of the ordinance referred to ‘outsiders’ using the Dearborn parks and ‘intimidating’ Dearborn residents. The reference to ‘outsiders’ and outsiders ‘intimidating’ Dearborn residents was intended to be understood and was commonly understood to mean black persons residing in the City of Detroit, and the primary argument in favor of the proposed ordinance by its proponents was that it would have the effect of excluding Detroit residents, the great majority of whom are black from using parks and recreation facilities in Dearborn.⁴⁷⁶

Supporters of the ordinance argued that the overcrowding of the city’s parks was the key issue. The parks ordinance clearly raised issues about the definition of public space. But intertwined with that was the issue of when and what histories should count. No one, not even the supporters of the ordinance could argue with Dearborn’s history of segregation and racism, but there was a concerted effort to forget that past. For the black community and their supporters, history added new and troubling layers of meaning to the ordinance. For others, the past did not clarify, but clouded the present.

In February, Mayor Guido announced that he had ended negotiations with the NAACP and others and had hired Detroit lawyer William Saxton to defend the city ordinance in court.⁴⁷⁷ When the case went to trial with Judge Thomas Stempein presiding, in May, Saxton argued that calling up the Hubbard legend would serve, “no purpose and does not prove that enforcement of the ordinance is unconstitutional.”⁴⁷⁸ Wayne State University law professor Robert Sedler, who represented the coalition opposing the ordinance, argued that Dearborn’s past was evident in the population of the

⁴⁷⁶ Gerdes, “City Wants Court Ruling.”

⁴⁷⁷ Wylie Gerdes, “Dearborn Ends Parks Ban Talks,” *The Detroit Free Press*, February, 26 1986, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁴⁷⁸ Judy Diebolt, “Dearborn Attorney Calls Past Irrelevant to Trial on Parks,” *The Detroit Free Press*, June 24, 1986, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

present.⁴⁷⁹ He pointed to the 1980 Census figures that showed only 3% of Dearborn's 90,000-plus citizens were black.⁴⁸⁰ When asked about how the city would enforce the ordinance, Mayor Guido said that there were no firm plans. Some options included fencing the parks and requiring all entrants to present Dearborn identification, having rangers make sweeps of the parks, asking all users to show identification, and having rangers check permits of large groups holding functions at the park.⁴⁸¹

In September, 1986, Judge Stempien ruled the Dearborn ordinance unconstitutional based on two factors: it was unconstitutional to randomly ask park users to produce identification and the ordinance could be used to discriminate against black Americans.⁴⁸² The NAACP accepted the ruling. Coalition members said that they would not pursue legal action against other Michigan municipalities that had similar ordinances such as the Grosse Pointes, Flat Rock, Gibraltar, and Clawson. When asked why, Reverend Charles Adam, president of the Detroit branch of the NAACP said that Dearborn was "unique in its capacity as a 'public city' because of the high volume of commuters." "Fairlane Mall, the Henry Ford Museum, Greenfield Village, Ford Motor Company and the University of Michigan-Dearborn are just some of the entities in the city that attract more than 300,000 commuters daily," he said.⁴⁸³

Adam's comments explicate the ways in which Dearborn's public spaces continued to be linked to the city's history of racism and discrimination in the minds of many African Americans. While many blacks frequented Fairlane Mall before the

⁴⁷⁹ Diebolt.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Brenda J. Gilchrist, "Judge Voids Non-Resident Ordinance," *The Detroit Free Press*, September 30, 1986, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁴⁸³ Gilchrist.

lawsuit, it was out of necessity rather than desire. The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, then, would have also been avoided. The lawsuit was a reminder of the city's troubling history of race relations, but it was also indicative of the ways in which Detroit metro-area culture had changed substantially since the early 1970s. Despite the backlash against desegregation, white flight, and the continuance of conservative politics in suburban enclaves, by the mid-1980s, many blacks and progressive whites had also gained power. Although the defeat of the park ordinance might be viewed in some ways as a small victory, it did mark a steadily growing shift in the power dynamics between whites and blacks.

Guido also made enemies in the city's Arab community. In 1985, Guido issued a campaign brochure called "Let's Talk about City Parks and the 'Arab Problem.'" He argued against using public funding to teach Arab Americans about Arabic culture and language and claimed that Arab Americans had a "gimme, gimme, gimme attitude." When asked about the campaign material he explained that he "never really thought it was that bad," and that he was just "giving" his "personal feelings on issues that were being talked about over the fence." Edwin Nassar, who immigrated to Dearborn in 1957, said that, "All in all, Mayor Guido is a racist." "He doesn't like Arabs," he continued that, "he has called us 'porchmonkeys' and 'gimme-gimmes.' He's not receptive toward us, he doesn't respect us, and he doesn't like having us in his city."⁴⁸⁴ Nassar also pointed out that Guido had never appointed an Arab American; in fact, none of Guido's 10 department heads were ethnic or racial minorities. Although 15% of the city's 89,000

⁴⁸⁴ Krodel.

residents identified themselves as Arab, approximately 95% of the city's employees were whites and 4% were Arab.⁴⁸⁵

In 1986, Dearborn scrambled to reshape its public image. In the early 1980s, Ford Motor Company challenged local tax assessments as it faced a decline in auto-sales.⁴⁸⁶ The reappraisal resulted in a substantial increase in property taxes, in some cases as much as 50%.⁴⁸⁷ Further, the Ford company also won a settlement over back taxes that cost the city \$10 million and the Dearborn School District about \$17 million.⁴⁸⁸ City and business leaders facing higher taxes responded by releasing a 12 minute video titled "Destination Dearborn" aimed at rescuing the city's image as racist and isolationist. Peggy Campbell, then president of the Dearborn Chamber of Commerce said, "the outside image of Dearborn was like Oregon, where they have signs that say 'We want you to visit us, but don't stay.'"⁴⁸⁹ The campaign also coincided with the Ford Motor Land Development Corporation's plans to develop more than 2,300 acres. Richard Routh, Ford Land's representative admitted that "we have some selfish interests in (promoting Dearborn) because we still have 1,400 acres to develop."⁴⁹⁰ Routh said the issue of the city's racism often came up in talks with business owners who were considering relocating to Dearborn. Routh said, "We tell them that we do everything we can to promote what our company stands for, and that's equal employment opportunities and aid to minority

⁴⁸⁵ Krodel.

⁴⁸⁶ Wylie Gerdes, "Dearborn Trying to Accentuate the Positive," *The Detroit Free Press*, November 27, 1986, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

businesses.”⁴⁹¹ City officials also developed a homestead plan, offering six vacant lots for \$99 to people willing to build on them during the 1987 construction season.

But public relations campaigns and legal wins did not reshape the persistent vision of Dearborn as a racist community in the minds of many African Americans. Further, many Dearbornites either continued to applaud or chose to forget the long history of segregation that Hubbard had worked so aggressively to maintain. In 1989, a \$60,000 bronze statue of Hubbard was erected next to city hall.⁴⁹² The erection of the statue was indicative of the complicated process of historical forgetting that often occurs on the landscape. In celebrating a politician who was an ardent segregationist, the city agreed to forget his racism while implicitly supporting his views. Certainly, the statue was just more evidence that marked the city as a racist space in the cognitive maps of black metro-area residents.

In 1992 and 1993, Reynolds Farley conducted extensive statistical analysis of racial relations in the Motor City and its surrounding suburbs. Combining his research with statistical analysis conducted by the University of Michigan’s Detroit Area Study, Reynolds identified a long and persistent history of racial division. Dearborn was identified as one of the suburban enclaves most unwelcoming to blacks. In the 1992 Detroit Area Study white and black metro-area residents were asked to identify whether current residents would welcome or not welcome blacks moving into Dearborn. Of those surveyed, 58% of white respondents and 86% of black respondents said that blacks would

⁴⁹¹ Gerdes, “Dearborn Trying to Accentuate the Postitive.”

⁴⁹² Dennis Niemiec, “Dearborn Image of Controversy City Unveils Bronze Statue of Hubbard,” *The Detroit Free Press*, April, 4 1989, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

not be welcome.⁴⁹³ In a more complex survey, white and black residents of the metro area were asked to categorize why they found specific suburbs undesirable. Twenty nine percent of white residents said that they found Dearborn undesirable because of the residential environment and 27% said that they found it undesirable for racial reasons.⁴⁹⁴ Of those who identified racial reasons, 11% pointed to the racial prejudice of residents and 18% pointed to the racial composition of the suburb's residents.⁴⁹⁵ Black respondents more decidedly identified racial reasons in their answers to this question; 83% said that they found Dearborn undesirable for racial reasons.⁴⁹⁶ Of those, 78% pointed specifically to the racial prejudice of Dearborn's residents.⁴⁹⁷

The Village, then, remained embedded in a racially divided urban landscape. A discussion and analysis of Skramstad's efforts to reshape and re-narrate the Village's representation of the past is particularly interesting given the difficulties that he faced. Yet in the marketing materials and memos produced during this period, none address the reputation of Dearborn. There is a renewed effort to improve ties to the city of Detroit, but never recognition of the site's location as a problem.

Skramstad and his staff sought to challenge the site's longstanding narratives of self-made manhood and individualism by emphasizing the ways in which communities operated during the Industrial Revolution. They also added components that drew on contemporary representational techniques, such as a working historical farm that once belonged to the Firestone family. In their representation of African American life, staff

⁴⁹³ Farley, 136.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

personalized the past by exploring the everyday lives of individuals at the site's plantation, slave cabins, and tenant farmer's house.

As a more thorough discussion of the representations at these buildings will show, however, historical narratives at the Village continued to draw on the lives of famous self-made Americans such as Harvey Firestone, Frederick Douglass, and Booker T. Washington, who had raised themselves up by their bootstraps. Further, the representation of middle-class life and poverty could be read in nostalgic ways: families had little material wealth, but they had each other. Despite the progressive elements of these interpretations, therefore, patrons could easily comport these new visions of American history with ones that supported a populist conservative reading of the past. A review of Skramstad's programs and the changes that he made to the site offers a useful glimpse into the strengths and limitations of the New history.

A New President, A New History, and an Old Village

Harold K. Skramstad's presidency, beginning in 1981, marked a turning point at the Village. In 1979, the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village reported, for the first time, a decrease in attendance. It was hoped that Skramstad, a 39 year old Ph.D. in American Civilization from George Washington University who had previously served as director of the Chicago Historical Society and had held management positions at the Smithsonian, could fix the problems that had plagued previous administrators and

staff.⁴⁹⁸ Although he made significant changes to the Henry Ford Museum, this chapter will focus more fully on those implemented at Greenfield Village. At the Village, Skramstad would attempt to reinterpret Ford's pastiche as a coherent story about the Industrial Revolution and its effects on American daily life. He used historical research to forge connections between the disparate buildings, purchased Harvey Firestone's birthplace turning it and Ford's home into working historical farms, and added an African American Cultures program that reinterpreted the slave cabins, the Susquehanna Plantation, and the Mattox House. But he also raised prices and ended such popular, but historically inaccurate special events as the Country Fair. While the changes he spearheaded would ultimately result in higher attendance rates by 1985, initially Skramstad's changes were not well received by visitors.

New Visions of the Village: Harold K. Skramstad and the "New Curriculum"

There were certainly a slew of minor changes to the Village during Skramstad's presidency, but this section examines the major changes made to the site; those that *seemed* to affect attendance rates and perceptions of the Village. When Skramstad arrived, he was faced with two primary problems. The first was a decrease in yearly attendance rates and subsequently, revenue. The second, which Skramstad saw as related to the first, was an identity crisis. For decades, administrators had struggled to find ways of locating the Village in the broader scheme of museums, as noted in previous chapters.

⁴⁹⁸ James S. Wamsley, "Harold K. Skramstad, Jr.," Box 63, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 3.

For Skramstad, the answer was to commit to the idea that the site's first and foremost purpose was to serve the public as an educational institution.

A brief biographical sketch by J.S. Wamsley offers a glimpse of how Skramstad envisioned the Village, its visitors, and his role as president. Wamsley begins by saying that Skramstad, a tall and spare man, with a “friendly, inquisitive personality...turned the place upside down.”⁴⁹⁹ His first initiative was the organization of a curriculum committee charged with the task of defining the site's historical resources and considering alternative methods of interpretation. After learning that 85% of the museum and Village's collections dated from 1800-1950, Skramstad decided that the Village's new interpretive program would focus on the Industrial Revolution, broadly defined.

Skramstad told Wamsley that administrators and audiences at the village would:

look at the Industrial Revolution in its broadest terms. We're not an industrial museum. We're not a museum of technology. The thing that's most unique at our museum and village is that this can be, and must be, the great American museum of change. The period in which America was transformed from a rural, agrarian economy to an industrial, urban, technological world power really signaled one of the basic shifts in how people lived and worked. It was a profound transformation. I feel we have an opportunity—indeed a responsibility—to help people understand the great change.⁵⁰⁰

Despite his decision to locate the Village in a specific time frame, Skramstad was not a positivist. He told Wamsley that, “Technology has clearly done the world some profound disservice,” but, he continued, “you can't stick your head in the sand... technology is just as important a word now as it was 100 or 150 years ago.”⁵⁰¹ “We're not telling people to have a particular attitude pro or con technology, but that technology and the change it

⁴⁹⁹ J.S. Wamsley, “Harold K. Skramstad, Jr.,” Box 63, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 3-4.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

wrought are part of the world. And to think about that, in a historical way.”⁵⁰²

Skramstad’s perspective reflects his political view, which clearly balanced the politics of new history with the realities of the needs and desires of museum goers.

Skramstad believed that the methods and practices of living history could make palpable the kinds of changes caused by the Industrial Revolution. “Displaying furniture and decoration, the things of daily life is important,” Skramstad said, “but our challenge is to have people in those houses carrying on the chores of daily life, so the visitor understands the complex social and economic system.”⁵⁰³ This focus on living history and the activities and objects used in every day life clearly reflects his academic training and his awareness of progressive techniques being used at other history museums.

Skramstad’s idealism was tempered with pragmatism. He recognized that many visitors used the Village as a public space outside of education: “it’s a tranquil, safe, park-like setting where they can have a nice walk.”⁵⁰⁴ Skramstad said his goal was to remind people of the “grim realities” of the past through details. “We leave the horse manure on the road a while...we dump ashes out beside the house when we reactivate our machine shop, we’re going to point out how people constantly got mangled in the machinery.” “People were sick and in pain much of their lives. So it was a different existence in many ways, but the life of the mind, the soul, was much the same.”⁵⁰⁵

Although he recognized that the site would inevitably be viewed by many patrons as a theme park, he sought to make that theme more historically significant than those explored at strictly commercial institutions.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 6.

⁵⁰³ Wamsley, 7.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 8.

As mentioned above, Skramstad created a Curriculum Committee shortly after his arrival to find ways of implementing his vision.⁵⁰⁶ He charged the committee with the task of identifying “the historical resources of the Edison Institute [the name used to refer to both the Village and museum],” and to determine how these resources could be “most effectively interpreted and made accessible” to the site’s “many publics.”⁵⁰⁷ The committee consisted of John Wright, G. Donald Adams, John Bowditch, Peter Cousins, Sheila Ford, Candance Matelic, and Henry Presbys.⁵⁰⁸ The committee suggested that the primary problem facing the museum and the Village was a “lack of agreement among the staff and in the public mind as to what the Edison Institute is all about.”⁵⁰⁹ For some, the committee recognized, the Village was clearly “History as Nostalgia.”⁵¹⁰ In fact, this approach had been “explicit in marketing the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village as ‘the good old days.’”⁵¹¹ They concluded that a new curriculum should not “deny the nostalgic impulse,” but should “take that emotional reaction and build upon it an understanding of historical truth as much as it can be known.”⁵¹² Further, the committee suggested that for other administrators and visitors, the museum and Village represented the colonial past. They went on to say that Village administrators and staff should no longer view the Institute as “the Williamsburg of the Midwest.”⁵¹³ Instead, they encouraged others to embrace the ways in which the museum and Village

⁵⁰⁶ “Curriculum Committee Report, 1981,” Box 1, Accession #88, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

⁵⁰⁷ “Curriculum Committee,” 1.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

collections document the “shift from a pre-industrial to an industrial society.”⁵¹⁴ The “old” curriculum also included perspectives that emphasized “History as Patriotism,” and, the committee pointed out, perhaps most ironically, “History as Progress,” which coexisted along with, but in apparent conflict to the view of “History as Nostalgia.” “History as Progress” most often took the form of technological progressivism. Finally, the “old” curriculum emphasized “History as One Story,” and “History as Trivia.”⁵¹⁵

The committee then identified what they perceived as the various roles that the museum and Village played. They recognized that, “many of the programs and services provided to the public by the Edison Institute relate less to our role as a historical agency than to a role as a community center.”⁵¹⁶ In allowing various publics to use the sites for weddings, banquets, and meetings, for example, the site functioned outside of its role as educational institution. The committee also identified the role that the museum and Village played as “Tourist Attraction.” In this section, a new approach to their location in the Detroit-metro area was proposed:

Related to the view of The Edison Institute as a tourist attraction is the ever present “problem” of being located in the Detroit area. In the past this has often been sidestepped by emphasizing our location in Dearborn, but there is no use kidding ourselves that we are not part of the Detroit scene for better or worse. Despite the continuing problems of Detroit, we must be an active part of the effort to vitalize the metropolitan area. This may mean developing better relations with the various relevant agencies in the city and the general area.

What is implied but unstated in this paragraph is the issue of race relations. In redefining its relationship to the city, administrators and staff were also admitting a new approach to potential black audiences. But even here, the curriculum committee fails to directly state

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁵¹⁵ “Curriculum Committee,” 22-24.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 24.

the problem of Dearborn and its history. Still, this marked a shift in the institution's understanding of its role in relation to the city.

The "new" curriculum offered a series of very different understandings of history. Included in the list were "History as Inquiry," "History as Meaning," and "Modernization." The new curriculum would work against the Village's longstanding message grounded in self-made manhood by emphasizing the ways in which the Village green and its buildings functioned as "symbols of community life."⁵¹⁷ Adams suggested that the story of Henry Ford be integrated into the broader story of transportation and that artifacts be represented as principal elements in the modernization of American society.⁵¹⁸ Candance Matelic and Donna Braden proposed focusing on food, clothing, and shelter in the homes to establish a common ground with visitors before teaching them about the ways in which modernization affected the domestic experience.⁵¹⁹ John Wright suggested incorporating the history of communications technology into various Village structures and using the carousel and Village Green to explore the history of leisure, popular arts, and entertainment that exploded at the turn of the twentieth century.⁵²⁰ At Menlo Park, Henry Presbys and Wright recommended focusing on Edison's invention of the modern laboratory. "Instead of one man doing all the work," they wrote, Edison, "pioneered the creation of a lab at which each member of staff worked on only part of a problem."⁵²¹

⁵¹⁷ "Curriculum Committee," 41.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

To achieve these goals the committee recommended a remapping of the Village into thematic areas: Agriculture, Domestic Life, and Pleasure and Entertainment. They also suggested developing the Henry Ford Birthplace into the Ford Farmstead and to present it as a living history farm. This locale would introduce visitors to the site, and would set the stage for Greenfield Village as an “immersion into the midwestern rural world of the late 19th century.”⁵²² With the exception of the Ford birthplace, however, interpretive rather than structural changes would comprise the bulk of revisions to the site.

Special events were also reviewed by the committee, which recommended that the Country Fair be dropped since it had “no legitimate historical basis in this setting or at this time of year.”⁵²³ Instead, the committee proposed a series of three or four 3-day weekends on the themes of transportation and manufactures. They also recommended moving the Old Car Festival to May and reframing the popular Colonial Military Muster, Fife and Drum, and Muzzle Loaders Festival in the context of Independence Day.⁵²⁴

The curriculum committee clearly viewed its report as bold, innovative, and controversial. In the closing paragraph, members wrote that they were aware the report might disappoint some and “outrage others.”⁵²⁵ Its members were optimistic about the potential to remake the museum and Village as distinct history museums with a more academic and rigorous definition of “History” at the site. Many of the changes proposed by the committee were instituted. A discussion of the changes implemented at the site

⁵²² Ibid., 52.

⁵²³ “Curriculum Committee,” 60.

⁵²⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 64.

demonstrates the extent to which administrators and staff were able to achieve their vision of a new Village.

From Old History to New: Physical and Interpretive Changes to the Village (1980-1996)

The first changes that Skramstad made to the museum and Village were financial. In 1979, interest from the Ford Motor Company's endowment to the museum and Village was \$4.4 million. These funds covered operating costs not paid for by income from admissions, donations, and concession sales. But in 1980, when the Ford stock dipped significantly, so did the endowment's interest; by 1982 it was \$1.7 million. Skramstad responded by raising the price of admission, hiring three investment companies to handle the museum and Village holdings, and selling Ford stocks and replacing them with more profitable ones. Between 1981 and 1983, the organization's investments in Ford stock went from 75% to 7%. A fundraising campaign targeted representatives from foundations and corporations who were invited to tour the complex. Between 1980 and 1982 donations went from \$129,000 to \$225,000. Skramstad also put the Village on a hiring freeze between 1980 and 1983. In 1983, Skramstad reported a balanced budget to the advisory board.⁵²⁶

During this period staff also made small interpretive changes that did not require a great deal of funding. These are reflected in the changing Village map (see Figure 4.1). In 1979, the Village buildings were divided into areas. Organizing the buildings in this way emphasized a growing thematic approach of the staff. When Skramstad arrived,

⁵²⁶ Roddy Ray, "Museum, Village Get a \$1 Million Challenge," *The Detroit Free Press*, December 17, 1984, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

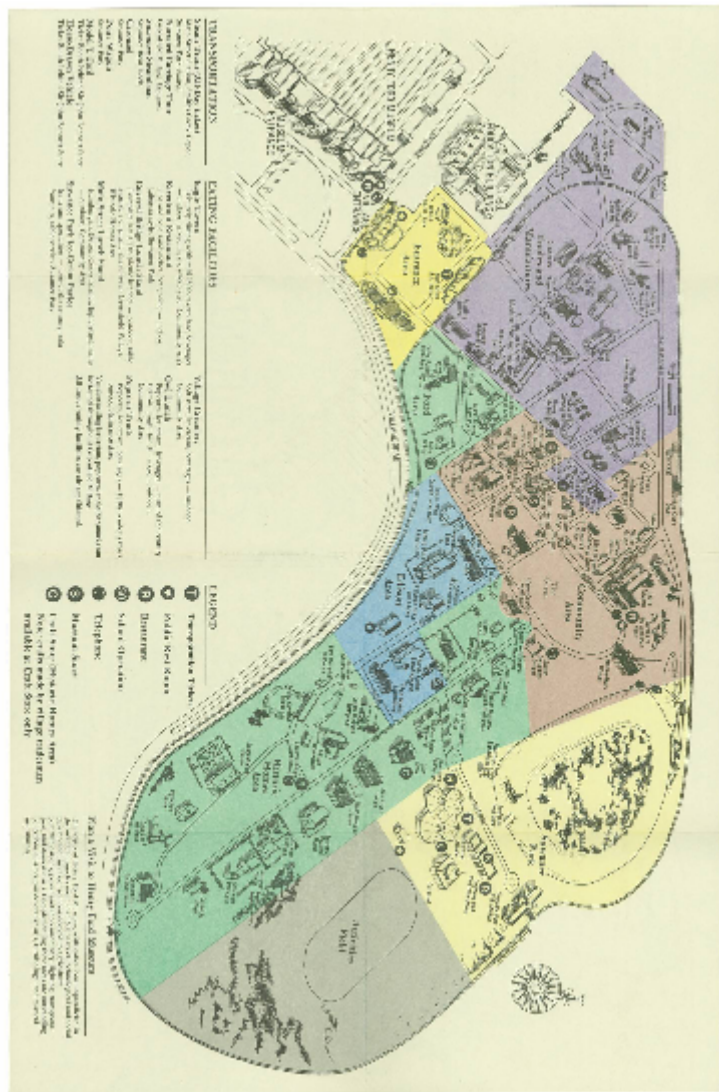


Figure 4.1: Map of the Village in 1982. During this period Skramstad was redefining the Village landscape by organizing it into themed areas. Box 2, Accession #21, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

these areas took on new names that reflected a vision of history as collective process rather than history as one story. In a 1982 map, the “Village Green” and “Commercial Area” are renamed the “Community Area.” And the “Early Industrial Area” were renamed “Trades and Manufactures.” The renaming of these areas, particularly the title “Community Area,” asks visitors to make a paradigm shift. Instead of viewing the general store, Martha-Mary chapel, Logan County courthouse, and town hall as a public space that could have existed in the past or present, staff asked patrons to consider the ways in which small town businesses and institutions were successful because they operated as a collective and built a sense of community among residents. In 1984, the Village received its biggest financial boon to date when the National Endowment for the Humanities announced a \$1 million grant to the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. The institute was challenged to raise \$3 million in new or increased support over the course of three years and the government would match those funds with \$1 million.⁵²⁷ Skramstad argued that the grant was “a recognition of our efforts to get through financial difficulties of the early 80s,” and a “real recognition that we have a nationally important institution here.”⁵²⁸ Some of the significant changes Skramstad and his staff planned to use the grant to implement included historical restoration of several buildings including the Noah Webster house and Menlo Park laboratory. Skramstad said that the restoration would be aimed at upgrading them based on “historical research done on them” and that he and museum staff wanted to “bring them into a higher state of historical conformity.”⁵²⁹ Repairs to the Henry Ford Museum would also be made, and the

⁵²⁷ Ray.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

administration would also use the funds to replace money borrowed from the endowment. Between 1980 and 1983, officials withdrew approximately \$4 million from the \$40 million endowment.⁵³⁰ This funding was just the first in a series of grants for which staff successfully applied. In 1984, the Michigan Council for the Humanities provided funds for the recreation of a 1912 Tent Chautauqua.⁵³¹ By applying for and winning grants from institutions that supported scholarly work, Skramstad and his administration worked to not only add more educational programming, but to alter the site's image.

The Chautauqua, with its focus on old-time entertainment and leisure culture was clearly meant to replace the Village's longstanding, but historically inaccurate, Country Fair. Ironically, the Chautauqua was historically praised and criticized in language similar to that surrounding the Village. Initially celebrated as the "country folk's university," these events were later accused of pandering to the masses, presenting watered-down education, and of confusing patriotism with religion.⁵³² At the Village, the Chautauqua featured actors playing William Jennings Bryan, Clarence Darrow, and Theodore Roosevelt, and musical performances, dramatic readings, and humorists in a 2,000 seat tent on the Village Green.⁵³³

One year later, the Village made the most significant architectural addition to the site since Ford's death. In 1982 Raymond Firestone decided that the family's summer homestead, built in 1828 by Harvey Firestone's great-grandfather, was in need of

⁵³⁰ Ray.

⁵³¹ John Guinn, "Greenfield Village Recreates the Era of Tent Chautauquas," *The Detroit Free Press*, May 6, 1984, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁵³² Ray.

⁵³³ Ibid.

preservation.⁵³⁴ Raymond Firestone looked to the Firestone Foundation and Greenfield Village for assistance. The Firestones and Fords had a long-standing personal and business relationship. Harvey Firestone, Henry Ford, Thomas Edison, and author John Burroughs had often gone camping together during the 1920s, and had visited the Firestone farm in Columbiana, Ohio. Firestone Company had provided the first 2,000 sets of tires for Ford's Model-T, and in the 1980s continued to be the largest supplier of tires to Ford Motor Company.⁵³⁵ Consequently, the movement of the family farm to the Village seemed a natural fit. The Firestone Foundation provided \$2 million to disassemble, move, rebuild, and maintain the home, and the Village offered an historic setting to which to relocate the site.⁵³⁶

On the day of the dedication in 1985, fifty relatives representing four generations of the Firestone family stood alongside former President Gerald Ford and William Clay Ford.⁵³⁷ For Raymond Firestone, the farm clearly represented the image of hard work and self-made manhood that his father had stood for. He told reporter Maryanne George that as a young boy, while on vacation at the farm, they had to "work eight hours every day."⁵³⁸ For Skramstad, however, the farm's significance extended beyond the Firestone name; it was an opportunity to recreate a living historical farm, one of the most popular representation techniques already used in well-recognized outdoor history museums such as Colonial Williamsburg. Staff working at the Firestone farm would dress in period clothing, care for the animals on-site, and prepare daily meals from the adjacent garden.

⁵³⁴ Maryanne George, "Firestone Family Farm Joins Greenfield Village," *The Detroit Free Press*, June 30, 1985, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

If the Firestone farm marked the most significant architectural addition, the reinterpretation of Susquehanna plantation was the most dramatic alteration to the site's interpretative program to-date. The Susquehanna home had been used to depict the colonial past by representing the lifestyle of a wealthy planter living in Maryland during the mid-seventeenth century since Henry Ford had moved the building to the Village in 1942. But a renewed effort to ground each building's interpretive program in more thorough historical research led to an investigation of tax records, maps, and an archeological dig at the Maryland site.⁵³⁹ Researchers found that the Susquehanna home had been confused with an older home that had been built on the same property. In fact, the home had been owned by tobacco planter and slave owner Henry Carroll.⁵⁴⁰ Upon this discovery, staff closed the building, completed their research, and developed a new interpretive manual. Curator Peter Cousins and others also asked for assistance from Rex Ellis, a consultant, historian and head of African-American Programs at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in Virginia.⁵⁴¹

When the Susquehanna reopened to the public in 1988, Nancy Diem, public relations manager at the time, admitted that the new exhibit focused primarily on the life of former plantation owner, Henry Carroll, rather than on slavery. Instead of placing enslavement at the center, "reminders" of human bondage, such as a bedroll in the kitchen appeared throughout the house.⁵⁴² Guide talks noted that the home, fairly modest in size, and limited furnishings, reflected Carroll's obsession with building his human

⁵³⁹ Roger Chesley, "Transported House Gives Plantation Life setting Reminders of Slavery are Part of the Display," *The Detroit Free Press*, August 12, 1988, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Ibid..

capital. Cousins told reporter Roger Chesley that, “We tried to make the point that this system of slavery kind of perverted the way people lived because they became so obsessed with value in human beings and in land.”⁵⁴³ Interpreters such as Lydia Senton wore 1860s style dress and used third person interpretation as they pointed out, for example, that the enslaved built the home and that the owner’s “comfort” depended on “human labor.”⁵⁴⁴

The Susquehanna interpretive program was certainly limited. Enslavement history was not the focal point but played around the edges of guide talks, home furnishings, and likely, visitors’ consciousness. Still, the recognition of enslavement at the Village was groundbreaking in the site’s own history. To acknowledge slavery and to frame it as unjust was a bold move at Ford’s Village. It also cemented the merging of academic and popular history. The Susquehanna’s representation of plantation life was, in many ways, a kind of middle-ground between the politics of new history and the politics of the predominantly white, suburban and small-town patrons who frequented the Village. Three years later, an even more extensive program aimed at representing black history opened in the slave cabins and the Mattox house (see Illustration 4.2). The buildings were restored and new interpretive programs were created with a cost totaling \$450,000.⁵⁴⁵ Skramstad and staff used funds from the NEH grant and the Skillman, Hudson-Webber and Knight Foundations to complete the buildings. They opened as part of a three day weekend celebration of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation that would become a mainstay at the site.

⁵⁴³ Chesley.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Sabrina Walters, “Exhibits at Greenfield Village Focus on 19th-Century Blacks,” *The Detroit Free Press*, August 9, 1991, <http://www.newsbank.com>.



Figure 4.2: The Mattox House opening celebration, 1991. Charles Heoles, who knew the Mattox family, was interviewed during the re-interpretation of the building with the goal of providing audiences with a more historically accurate interpretation of the home. Box 53, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

The Mattox house was brought to the Village in 1943. Curators began to research the exact history of the home and it was during this process that the difficulties of representing an accurate past at a privately funded institution were clarified. Researchers found that Ford had purchased the home from Andrew and Charlotte Mattox. Andrew was a freed slave who had since purchased land in Ways, Georgia and moved into the house that was used by the plantation's overseer. During one of his cross-country road trips, Ford saw the house and purchased it from the Mattox family. Edward J. Cutler described how the house came to arrive at the Village in an interview:

This Mattox house came about in a peculiar way, I would say it was a tenant house. It had gone to about the limit or beyond, but people were, however, living in it. It rained very hard one morning and the roof on this building was a "patch work roof." Mr. Ford got curious about it and had Burns drive in and ask Mrs. Mattox—the Mattox were the colored people who were living in the place—did she get wet when it rained in there! They had everything they owned out on the clothes line. She said "When it rains, we get wet, but the water runs out." He said, "We will fix you up a little house." So, they just tore the old one down and shipped it up here. In doing it over in the Village, it was necessary to throw out about eighty percent of the material on account of it being so badly eaten up with termites.⁵⁴⁶

This likely explains why Charles Heoles, a childhood friend of the Mattox's daughter who was interviewed during the restoration process found that the house resembled the "old building, but it's in much better shape."⁵⁴⁷ Heoles said that the family wasn't "able to keep it up," because they were "poor and illiterate," and that there was also a lot of "illnesses and diseases."⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁶ "Edward J. Cutler Interviews 1955-1956," Accession #167, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

⁵⁴⁷ Walters.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

Cutler also confirmed that Ford then provided the family with a new home.⁵⁴⁹ After Ford's death in 1947, however, the family found that Ford had never completed the paperwork that deeded the house to the Mattox family and they found themselves homeless and removed from land they had lived on for sixty-plus years. In the new on-site manual, the recommended talk included information about Ford's negligence. After explaining the history of the Mattox family, guides were offered the following suggested talk:

Members of the Mattox family occupied this home until Henry Ford purchased it in the 1940s. He built the family another home and purchased new furniture in exchange for their furniture to be used here at Greenfield Village. A paper mill purchased the land after Ford's death. Unfortunately, the Mattox family had nothing in writing of the agreement between them and Henry Ford and the family was eventually evicted.⁵⁵⁰

But it is difficult to know whether guides presented patrons with this new information. Likely, they only offered it under specific circumstances.

The new interpretive program at the Mattox house focused on the building and its inhabitants during the 1930s. Interpreters explained that the Mattox house told “the story of a particular family—the Mattoxes of Bryan County, Georgia—within the general setting of African-American rural life between the two world wars.”⁵⁵¹ They sought to “populate visitors’ imaginations with stories of specific people who,” had owned their land and home, earned their living through resourcefulness, sustained important family relationships, maintained a sense of dignity and propriety, valued religion and education, and preserved and expressed their culture, while simultaneously struggling to triumph

⁵⁴⁹ “Edward J. Cutler Interviews 1955-1956.”

⁵⁵⁰ “Mattox House On-Site Manual,” Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 15.

⁵⁵¹ “Evaluating the Interpretive Program Presented at Hermitage Slave Houses and Mattox House: Comments from Members of the Transition Team,” Accession #186, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 7.

over racism and poverty.⁵⁵² To achieve these goals, interpreters drew on the furnishings of the home and its surroundings, which included a field in front of the house, crops, a grape arbor, fences, and a birdhouse.

The recommended talk for guides, however, did not explicitly mention racism. While the achievements of the Mattox family are offered in detail, there are few clear links between the Mattox family and the ways in which racism and prejudice continued to shape African American life after the Civil War:

Andrew and Charlotte built the little two-room farmhouse. The rear well was added later. The furnishings in the home belonged to the next generation of Mattoxes—Amos and Grace Mattox. Both Amos Morel and his grandson were preachers, and outstanding members of the community. In order to provide for his children, Amos Mattox usually worked two or three jobs. He worked for Bryan County and the Atlantic Coastline and Seaboard Railroads as a mail carrier (until he was injured by lightning). He was a farmer, barber, cobbler, and preacher at the same church his grandfather founded. Grace Mattox, his wife, was a meticulous homemaker who crocheted and did “fancy hand work” embroidery. She canned vegetables for needy neighbors and helped tend the sick or ailing. A devoted mother, part of her daily routine was to prepare a “proper hot lunch” for her two children, Carrie and Amos, pack it in a picnic basket, walk to school (a distance of one mile) and wait for them to finish eating. Upon returning home, she would prepare the family supper. The families of Carrie Mattox and Amos Mattox Jr. live in Savannah today. Both, as well as their children are contributing members of the Savannah community.⁵⁵³

The script certainly celebrates the Mattox family. Grace Mattox is not only a “meticulous homemaker,” but also a humanitarian to her fellow neighbors. African Americans are venerated and marked as heroes and heroines through the ordinary, but meaningful accomplishments of everyday life. In this way, the interpretive script challenged conventional definitions of “who matters” in American history. What is missing, however, is a discussion of the ways in which the Mattox family lived in the context of

⁵⁵² “Evaluating the Interpretive Program Presented at Hermitage Slave Houses.”

⁵⁵³ “Mattox House On-Site Manual,” 15.

Jim-Crow laws. In contrast to poor white tenant farmers, the Mattox family was also subject to racist political policies and attitudes. But this difference is not highlighted in the interpretive script presented to patrons. The story of the Mattox family, then, could easily be enfolded, in a worldview that celebrates individuality and hard work, while simultaneously ignoring issues of race.

At the same time that the Mattox house was refurbished, staff also changed the stories told at the Hermitage slave cabins (see Figure 4.3 and 4.4). In these buildings a staff used a dual approach. One of the cabins remained empty with the exception of wall panels. A running tape read excerpts from the slave narratives of Elizabeth Keckley, Jacob Stroyer, Frederick Douglass, Charles Equiano, and Henry Box Brown. In this way, interpreters hoped to provide glimpses of how other enslaved peoples survived. The brick cabins were unusual; most slaves lived in much harsher conditions and through these narratives, interpreters hoped to achieve a more balanced perspective.

In 1994, another change was revealed when Skramstad and staff re-opened the general store. The Elias Brown General Store was renamed the J.R. Jones General Store.⁵⁵⁴ Previously, the store had contained a variety of goods from the 1830s to the 1930s. Curator Donna Braden explained that the “building was from Michigan, the Elias Brown sign was from upstate New York and the stock was from old stores all over the country.”⁵⁵⁵ Curators set to work correcting these “historical inconsistencies,” and when the store reopened its doors, it was run by an interpreter playing the role of J.R. Jones. Some of the goods displayed included 1880s-style bolts of cloth, straw hats, and cans of

⁵⁵⁴ Steven R. Nickerson, “Greenfield Village’s Renovated Store Brings Past to Life,” April 21, 1994, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.



Figure 4.3: The Hermitage Slave Houses during one of the first African American Weekends in August of 1990. Box 47, Accession #1929, Edison Records Institute, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.



Figure 4.4: Inside the Hermitage Slave Houses in 1992. The home was furnished with the material objects by then identified as common to the enslaved African American household. Box 47, Accession #1929, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

vegetables. Curator Mary Seelhorst had worked with curators to provide more than 2,500 reproductions for the store. Braden explained that the “new old store,” “makes the point that the 1880s were a pivotal time in the development of consumer goods.”⁵⁵⁶ The store reflected the “New Curriculum’s” focus on the Industrial Revolution. The interpretation at the site aimed at exploring the ways in which people’s everyday lives were altered through mass production.

By the mid-1990s, the new interpretive program at the Village and the major architectural additions made during Skramstad’s presidency were completed. Skramstad and his staff had made significant alterations aimed at elevating the site’s reputation among other history museums and raising attendance rates. In many ways, Skramstad achieved his goals. How, then, did visitors perceive and encounter the site? Were the changes viewed as improvements or did they challenge visitors who had long used the site as a community center, or who had found reassurance in nostalgic narratives? The answer is likely both. While the African American visitor population remained low, photographs of special events indicate that the black community was attracted to the new interpretation of the African American past. First time visitors were also likely either impressed or did not notice the alterations to the longstanding narrative. Returning white patrons may have found the changes in admission prices and the discontinuation of the Country Fair annoying, but the new interpretive focus could be ignored if so desired. A brief review of marketing surveys and a contemplation of visitor experiences by new marketing firms offers a useful starting point for further consideration of patrons and their encounters with the “new” Village.

⁵⁵⁶ Nickerson.

Understanding and Shaping Reception: Visitor and Marketing Analysis (1980-1996)

The same year that Greenfield Village opened the Firestone Farm, and threw itself into a battle for recognition as a legitimate history museum, a brief article appeared in *The Detroit Free Press* in February that documented a couple's unique commemorative activities surrounding the Civil War.⁵⁵⁷ George Kalamas and his wife Mary were living in Lincoln Park when reporter Jon Pepper interviewed them. Mary explained that she had been a staunch defender of the Union's cause ever since a friend had convinced her to join a genealogical society. Through research, she found that her great-great-grandfather Louis Lambert Baubein had fought in and survived the battle at Gettysburg. But Baubein's greatest claim to fame was that he was one of the soldiers who carried Lincoln's body out of Ford's Theater after his assassination.⁵⁵⁸ George identified himself as a Civil War buff, but his interest and sympathy lay with the Confederacy. Pepper explained that George was particularly fond of playing a tape-recording of "Dixie" as he made lead bullets for his Civil War-era rifle in his basement.⁵⁵⁹ To complete the mood, George also displayed a confederate flag, empty bottles of Rebel Yell bourbon, and a license plate asking others to "Forget, Hell!"⁵⁶⁰ During his lunch break from his analyst position at General Motors Corporation in Warren, George often escaped to his car where he poured through books such as Bruce Catton's *This Hallowed Ground*.⁵⁶¹ Ultimately, however, their divided politics drew the couple closer through a general interest in

⁵⁵⁷ Jon Pepper, "This Couple Won't Forget the Civil War," *The Detroit Free Press*, February 7, 1985, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.

military history. A longstanding tradition was the Kalamas's trip with their three children to the Muzzle loaders festival at Greenfield Village.⁵⁶²

The story of the Kalamases and the role that the Village played in their hobbies surrounding the Civil War embodies the multiple fronts on which museum professionals would have to wage battle as they worked to alter the Village's narrative and reshape how patrons used the past at the site. Visitors arrived at the Village with a variety of historical frames of reference in mind; often personal interests and pasts mixed with national and local histories, and if they were of a certain age, some opinion about Ford and Edison. However, Skramstad's idealistic goals were balanced with pragmatism. Rather than hoping patrons would leave the Village with a radically altered ideological perspective, he envisioned that they would depart with a series of questions in mind and a broader interest in history.

A review of marketing strategies and surveys conducted at the site exposes the degree to which administrators and staff achieved their goals. It also proposes reflection on the approach of personalization. Under perfect circumstances, personalizing history leads patrons to an intimate connection with the past, one that raises consciousness and changes ideological perspectives. But such an approach forgets that visitors are already making personal connections to the past. They want to see themselves and their own history in the material culture on display and defined as "historic." Many patrons likely viewed Edison's lab and Ford's Quadricycle shop with nostalgia for what they too might have been. Such notions were reinforced when they happily noticed the similarities between their childhood or their grandparent's childhood experiences and the middle and

⁵⁶² Pepper.

working class domestic experiences represented at the Village. Further, even representations of poverty are bound by the image of self-made manhood that Ford embodies. Administrators and staff thus faced a daunting task as they attempted to disentangle history from the politics of populism.

In 1980, administrators received a report from Brewer and Associates Incorporated, the Village's outside marketing firm since 1966, titled "A Decade of Marketing Activities at the Edison Institute: 1970-1980."⁵⁶³ The report was likely written in response to the decline in attendance. During the Bicentennial, the Village welcomed a record number of visitors. But by 1980, attendance had dipped to just over 1 million. The report, then, was in many ways a defense of the marketing and advertisement techniques that the Village had used. For the purposes of this chapter, however, this document illuminates the texture of the Village's audiences and their experiences. While some of the data simply supports the demographic information analyzed in Chapter Three, it is useful to consider how marketers envisioned and understood the "typical" visitor to the Village at the end of the 1970s.

Out of every 100 visitors, Brewer asserts that 50 are first-time visitors, 35 have friends or relatives who have visited before, 15 are new visitors without any referral, 50 are repeat visitors, 40 have visited in the past twelve years, and 10 are the children of adults who had frequented the Village.⁵⁶⁴ Brewer also found that visitors "skew on the high side of the normal demographic profile in education, age, income, and

⁵⁶³ Brewer and Associates Incorporated. "A Decade of Marketing activities at The Edison Institute," Box 69, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

profession.”⁵⁶⁵ In Brewer’s mind, it was this skew that accounted for the fact that more visitors came “from suburbs and smaller cities and towns.”⁵⁶⁶

Brewer then compared the Village and museum to Colonial Williamsburg. Throughout the history of the Village administrators had looked to Colonial Williamsburg as a model, and after its recovery from lower attendance rates after the Bicentennial, they again turned their attention to this site looking for answers. Even administrators recognized that the Village was inextricably linked to its locale. Brewer contends that the lower attendance is most likely attributable to the “economic catastrophe in the automotive-oriented cities in the Great Lakes region.”⁵⁶⁷ In the following section, he outlined the activities and events that had participated in attendance shifts both up and down, and looked to Detroit’s economic problems and reputation for violence for answers to the Village’s declining attendance rates. Although Brewer included in his list of negatives a fire which was erroneously reported in some newspapers as having completely destroyed the Village, the rise of theme parks within the target market, and increased inclement weather, he also assigns blame to the Detroit riot, the Cobo Hall muggings, and the metro-area’s and national gasoline crises.⁵⁶⁸ Included among the “positive” activities at the Village were the addition of special events, re-direction of Christmas activities, the Bicentennial, Anniversary activities, more emphasis on group promotion, “exceptional public relations efforts,” (of course) and changes in the institution’s advertising strategy.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁵ Brewer and Associates Incorporated, 6.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

As part of his effort to revitalize the Village, Skramstad and his administration sought a new marketing team in 1982. That year, Alan S. Newman Associates, Incorporated, based in Richmond Virginia, submitted a marketing proposal to the site. The firm had worked with Colonial Williamsburg, which had seen an increase in attendance and rebounded from a declining visitor population in the 1980s. The firm had also worked with a variety of other historical theme parks including Kings Island, Canada's Wonderland, Mattel's Circus World, and Six Flags, Inc.⁵⁷⁰ During the hiring process they presented a Marketing Strategy and Research Proposal to Don Adams, then the Director of Marketing. In doing so, they also shed light both on the museum's struggle to find an identity and the visitor population. The proposal opens with a call for the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village to reconsider its goals:

As education is the goal of the Museum, it is paramount we recognize the role of marketing and strategic planning. The education presented in the displays and exhibits fulfills the higher levels of basic human needs, but we propose focusing on a need we identify as more primary in nature. We would suggest that in these somewhat depressing times, a primary need surfaces... the desire to seek enjoyment, to escape when threatened by everyday cares, to find pleasure when surrounded by disappointment and uncertainty. As a strategic goal and philosophy, we propose that the marketing of the Museum and Village offer these need-satisfying appeals of fun, excitement and entertainment.⁵⁷¹

Interestingly, this is followed with an assessment of prior attempts to attract visitors using the "theme park" approach as problematic. Researchers argued that such tactics led to an "erosion of quality image," a "decrease in generic, basic museum attendance," and a "diminished public desire to visit."⁵⁷² Researchers suggested repositioning the site as a

⁵⁷⁰ Alan S. Newman Associates, Incorporated, "Marketing Strategy and Research Proposal Presented to The Edison Institute, April, 1982," Box 72, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 12.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 6.

“foremost institution and specifically a museum.”⁵⁷³ Other objectives included “achieving a level of quality of other American museums,” and focusing on “interpretation of the collection” and increasing the level of enjoyment.⁵⁷⁴ Exactly how these goals were to be accomplished through marketing are less clear from the Alan S. Newman report. But these suggestions are demonstrative of the way in which Skramstad and his staff concluded that their desire to impose a more historically accurate interpretive program on the site, and to alter the Village’s image might lead to greater revenue. Further, even Alan S. Newman and Associates researchers recognized that such shifts would directly challenge the ways in which visitors had long used the site:

changes that may further cause concern among a vocal group of past visitors. Relocation of the furniture collection, the increase in admissions prices, a proposed auction and staff changes are felt to be potential causes for more public concern and misinterpretation.⁵⁷⁵

Researchers proceeded by conducting their own visitor survey. During July and August of 1982, they handed out 1,000 surveys of which 442 were returned by mail.⁵⁷⁶ Visitors were offered the questionnaires as they left either the Museum or the Village and were told to return them by mail. There were two versions of the survey that were used, which were reported separately. In survey “B” respondents were asked what changes they would like to see implemented at the Village. Both survey findings comported with those reported in other visitor surveys conducted prior to 1982.⁵⁷⁷

Some of the “Key Findings” of survey “A” were that a little less than half of visitors (48%) were “first timers,” which is consistent with prior surveys. Local and

⁵⁷³ Alan S. Newman Associates, Inc., 7.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

repeat visitors were more likely to visit the Village only. As in previous years, most visitors enjoyed the houses the most and Suwannee Park the least.⁵⁷⁸ Most visitors reported that the head of household on the trip was between the ages of 35 and 44 (30%) and 45 and 54 (20%).⁵⁷⁹ Patrons were also more likely to make a middle-class income. Of the respondents, 41% reported an income of between \$20,000 and \$34,000.⁵⁸⁰ Thirty percent of visitors made over \$35,000.⁵⁸¹ Repeat visitors were more likely to make between \$20,000 and \$35,000 (38%) or over \$35,000 (34%).⁵⁸² Respondents to survey “B” provided similar answers. But survey “B” also asked visitors to comment on changes to the site. Visitors were asked to select one of seven changes as being the best addition to the Village. The choices offered included new exhibits about famous Americans, more rides, a wide-screen movie explaining what the Village and museum were all about, actors portraying daily life, different restaurants and shopping areas, more participatory activities like driving an old car, and a special tour just for children of toys, trains, planes, and bicycles. Ranked first was the addition of a wide screen movie. Marketers concluded that this indicated that many visitors remained slightly confused about the exact nature and purpose of the Village and museum. But it may have also pointed to the ways in which visitors were eager to see the incorporation of multi-media into venues they used for both education and leisure.⁵⁸³

One year later administrators commissioned a report from the Martin Agency, which prepared an outline for a new marketing and communications program. This report

⁵⁷⁸ Alan S. Newman and Associates Inc., 9.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.

is useful in considering how the Village envisioned its visitors and challenges to raising attendance after Skramstad's alterations to the site were initiated and in contemplating who the typical visitor was during the 1982 season. The agency begins by noting the decrease in attendance numbers between 1980 and 1983. Researchers argued that the increasing unemployment rate in the Great Lakes Region was one reason for the decline in attendance. But attendance problems are also attributed to the numerous changes instituted by Skramstad. One obvious cause for a declining attendance, researchers note, was Skramstad's decision to increase in prices in 1981 from \$4.75 to \$8.00.⁵⁸⁴ The agency also reported that "attendance has also been discouraged by the Museum's decision to cut back on some of the programs that the public has traditionally favored (e.g., the handcrafts program)."⁵⁸⁵ Skramstad also decided to end the traditional Country Fair, which had few historical connections. The agency then notes that the "New Curriculum" at the Village had led to several positive changes. The operation of the Armington Sims machine shop, the Circular Sawmill and the Grist Mill, the new interpretive program at the Connecticut Saltbox and Edison Home, and the purchase of the Firestone Complex for the recreation of a historical working farmstead were all identified as improvements to the Village.⁵⁸⁶

Shortcomings and weaknesses of the site were also noted, however. Researchers argued that the seasonal closing of many buildings diluted the visitor experience. They

⁵⁸⁴ Martin Agency, "Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village 1983 Marketing and Communications Program," Box 79, Accession #235, Edison Institute Records, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford, 2-3.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

also noted that there was a “lack of orientation and structure to one’s visit.”⁵⁸⁷ After arriving, visitors were given little explanation about what they were about to see and why. Without a prescribed or suggested tour route, visitors were left to wander on their own. Poor quality and choice of food was another complaint often lodged by visitors. The site also faced, researchers argued, an “Identification Crisis.” The public, they wrote, “has had a hard time establishing a correct understanding of the place.” “For many years,” they continued, “the Museum and Village wanted to emulate Colonial Williamsburg, subordinating its own personality. Other times it has tried to frame itself as a comfortable serene retreat, or as the home of American free enterprise.”⁵⁸⁸ The changes wrought by Skramstad and his staff had come without providing the visitor with an understanding of how they would improve the site. “Many people,” they said, “are confused if not irritated.”⁵⁸⁹ Other “weaknesses” listed were: insufficient revenue, a lack of private and corporate support, the reputation of Detroit, and a lack of real cooperation between local hotels and the museum and Village.⁵⁹⁰

The report then attempts to outline the typical visitor, noting that most Village patrons came from the site’s home state. The average visitor was aged 25-64, accompanied by a spouse or by his or her family, a member of a household with an income of \$20,000 or more, high school educated or better, visiting with some knowledge about the place prior to arrival, spending at least one night away from home, and purchasing a regular admissions ticket.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁹⁰ Martin Agency, 15-16.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 20.

In January, researchers conducted a phone survey to determine what Detroit metro-area residents knew about the Village and museum.⁵⁹² They found that everyone knew about the Village, but that only 29% thought of the site when asked what places of interest like museums, theme parks, and historical attractions are available in your area.⁵⁹³ As the income and education of respondents increased, so did their “unaided awareness” of the site. For respondents earning in excess of \$30,000 annually and for those who had received some post-graduate college education, 57% mentioned the Village.⁵⁹⁴ But researchers also fail to consider the ways in which more impoverished or non-whites may have discounted the Village as a potential site to visit because of its location in Dearborn. Although marketers recognized the metro-area as an important source for patrons, and noted that the image of Detroit could be a problem, there was no open discussion of the racial divisions that marked the metro-area. Researchers also asked respondents to the telephone survey why they came. Thirty percent said they came “for the kids,” and the second most common answer (9%) was a general enjoyment of history.⁵⁹⁵ The primary answer of respondents indicated that Detroit metropolitan area residents viewed the site as a “family experience.” This answer is also reflective of the ways in which the Village continued to be used as an alternative public space. The site was a place that middle and upper middle class (likely whites) felt comfortable bringing their children. In many respects, then, the visitor population and the site’s problems remained static during the 1983 season.

⁵⁹² Martin Agency, 21.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 22.

A review of an evaluation of the African American Family Life and Culture Project almost ten years later assists in an exploration of whether Skramstad's administration was able to effectively alter the Village's interpretation of the past. In 1992, members of the African-American Family Life and Culture Project Transition Team prepared an evaluation of the presentations at the Hermitage Slave Houses and the Mattox House.⁵⁹⁶ The interpretive programs presented at each building were evaluated by three different teams during the fall of 1991. The first evaluation team consisted of members of the transition team. The original exhibit design team, representatives from the School and Community Programs department, and staff members from Program Development joined to review the new interpretive program.⁵⁹⁷ The second evaluation team consisted of interpreters who had worked at the sites. And the third evaluation team consisted of Detroit-area teachers who brought groups of students to visit while participating in the 1991 Summer Institute on "African and African-American Heritage," which was sponsored by the Michigan Humanities Council.⁵⁹⁸ This chapter focuses on the second and third evaluations because they reveal more about the visitor experience. At the bottom of the page that begins interpreter's comments to the Mattox house, the report notes that, "We should also be aware that less than 5% of our visitors are African-Americans who generally asked different questions from European Americans."⁵⁹⁹ This comment indicates further that the vast majority of visitors were white. This chapter assumes, then, that the majority of visitor comments recorded by interpreters were made by white patrons.

⁵⁹⁶ "Evaluating the Interpretive Program," 1.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 125.

Interpreters at the site brought a particularly interesting perspective on how visitors encountered the stories and objects at each building. For example, in answer to the question, “How do visitors respond to the story of African American Family Life and Culture that you interpreted for them at this site,” two of the nine interpreters responding said simply “Moderate-favorable.”⁶⁰⁰ Four noted that the visitors were “surprised,” about a particular aspect of the site, like the fact that the cabins were the only double walled cabins in the U.S., or that McAlpin used the task system of labor to cultivate his rice crops. Interpreters or a tape explained that in the task labor system, enslaved peoples were given one-quarter acre of land for rice planting, or one quarter to one-half acre of rice land to hoe. Occasionally, interpreters explained, tasks could be completed in less than a day. In a series of questions about visitor responses to Building #1, the unfurnished building, interpreters noted that many visitors just walked through to get to the furnished building and others said that visitors did not ask many questions about that building.⁶⁰¹ In Building #2, which was furnished with a cot, several gourds, some tools, and a gun either a live interpreter or a taped interpretation was used. Interpreters, unsurprisingly, found the tapes less helpful than when they did the explaining to visitors. They noted that when the tape was used, several visitors said that “slaves didn’t have it so bad,” and that they had to then explain that these brick slave cabins were an anomaly.⁶⁰² One noted that visitors respond with disbelief, saying that “many poor whites didn’t live this good.”⁶⁰³ Another interpreter explained that “Most visitors accept all furnishings except the bed

⁶⁰⁰ “Evaluating the Interpretive Program,” 106.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, 110.

and gun.”⁶⁰⁴ When the tape was not used, interpreters were less critical, likely because they were guarding themselves. Interpreters did note, however, that the top three questions asked were: “Did slaves live like this?” and if so, “was this owner more kind, gentler than others?” “Did they really have a gun?” and, “How many people lived in the house?”⁶⁰⁵ The number one question that children asked was where the enslaved children slept.⁶⁰⁶

Several visitors at the Mattox House made connections between their own lives and that of the Mattox family. For example, one interpreter said that older visitors often said things like, “I know about the newspaper on walls. I lived in a house like this.”⁶⁰⁷ Other comments about the home furnishings also often centered on patron’s personal links to them. Interpreters noted that many visitors said things like:

My mother had a trunk like that.
We played checkers with bottle caps.
This furniture reminds me of the furniture that my family had.⁶⁰⁸

Many visitors found commonalities between the Mattox family’s lifestyle and their own family’s experiences. What were the consequences of this kind of encounter? In one sense, patrons who had grown up or whose family had lived under similar conditions found common ground between their own lives and that of African Americans. Class created a bond between white patrons and the Mattox family. Alternatively, however, white patrons may have left the home with a sense that African Americans had faced

⁶⁰⁴ “Evaluating the Interpretive Program,” 111.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

challenges no different than those of white Americans. The history of racism seemed to be lost in the interpretive process.

For patrons who did not identify with the Mattox family due to similar experiences with poverty, the experience was one of disbelief. The most frequently asked question listed by interpreters was: “Did they really have newspaper on the wall?”⁶⁰⁹ The second most popular question reflected patrons’ desire to fit the Mattox narrative into the theme of self-made manhood: “What was Mr. Mattox famous for?” This question reveals an underlying assumption that the story of the Mattox family did not end with their small home, but only began there.

Respondents from the Summer Institute on “African and African-American Heritage,” offered comments similar to those noted by interpreters. The most common critique from teachers revolved around the Hermitage slave houses. There was great concern that students would assume that most enslaved peoples lived in brick slave quarters. Wendy Watson, a Trustee from the Cranbrook Peace Foundation who took Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Oscar Arias on a tour of the Village also commented on the limitations of the Hermitage slave houses. Dr. Arias noted that the brick slave houses looked like “a palace compared to the barrios in the poor South American countries.” Watson expressed concern that patrons might leave the exhibit thinking that “slavery was not so terribly bad after all.” She then said:

I understand that the museum is a showplace for ingenuity in American history, and that the slave quarters exhibit follows this theme. The ingenuity displayed existed, I am sure, but for most slaves this was against all odds. I think this particular exhibit would benefit from showing what those odds were—perhaps

⁶⁰⁹ “Evaluating the Interpretive Program,” 134.

another dwelling showing tight, cramped quarters, with signage and an interpreter detailing instances of typical life.⁶¹⁰

For many, then, the slave house interpretation was inadequate because it failed to adequately communicate the trauma, injustice, and horrors of enslavement. There is an indication in the evaluation of the answers submitted by staff, interpreters, and visitors that the interpretive program would be changed after 1992 to more accurately reflect the terrors of enslavement. Site visits from 2004-2007 confirm that the interpretations continue to mirror those described in the evaluation. An analysis of current interpretive practices is explored in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

In 1996, Skramstad turned over the executive reigns to Steven Hamp who had long served as Skramstad's right hand man. William Clay Ford Jr. was elected board chairman, replacing his sister Sheila Ford Hamp, who was also Steven Hamp's wife. Skramstad said, "I have always felt that CEOs tend to stay too long. It's time to turn over leadership to the next generation."⁶¹¹ The year before, the Village reported an attendance rate of 1.1 million, a happy return to higher numbers that made it the second most visited historical institution behind the Smithsonian.⁶¹² Skramstad said that during his tenure he

⁶¹⁰ "Evaluating the Interpretive Program," 147-48.

⁶¹¹ Jim Finkelstein, "New Brass at Ford Museum Skramstad Handpicks Hamp as President," June 28, 1996, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*

had improved the museum's financial condition and taken it from a traditional museum to one "that can truly inspire people."⁶¹³

On the surface, it appeared that Skramstad achieved his goal. He altered the site's interpretive scripts and added more cutting-edge representations such as the Firestone farm. Of particular significance was the addition of the African American Family Life and Culture Project. Despite these marked changes, however, the experience of the Village visitor seemed to remain static. The answer why lies in the powerful narrative of populism and the image of Dearborn.

Skramstad and his staff made significant alterations to the Village. In many ways they drew on the ideas of other museums in representing the traumatic past by focusing on everyday experience and attempting to personalize the past. But each of the stories they added could be easily folded into broader narratives that celebrated self-made manhood, or the benefits of an agricultural economy and small town life. In the case of the Firestone Farm, for example, visitors would have recognized the name and could easily fit the harshness of a working farm into popular historical narratives about the benefits of hard work and the ways in which hard work and small town beginnings can lead one to greatness. At the Susquehanna plantation, enslavement was not at the center, but the periphery of the story. Patrons could focus more on middle-class domesticity and material culture. And the Hermitage Slave Quarters and the Mattox House could support visions of slavery that suggested it wasn't "all that bad." White visitors could create links between whites and blacks that forgot the difference between poverty and enslavement.

⁶¹³ Finkelstein.

Certainly, these narratives could also be interpreted in progressive ways. But in 1992, the site continued to have a low percentage of African American visitors, despite the addition of an important new African American interpretive program and its location in one of the nation's most diverse metro-areas. In all of the marketing materials I reviewed, none mentioned the image of Dearborn among the metro-area's black population. Only three years before the institution of the African American project, Dearborn had unveiled a statue celebrating one of the country's most racist mayors. Before the black community chose to frequent the Village, the local historical memories of Orville Hubbard would have to be forgotten.

One year after Skramstad stepped down Coleman Young completed his final term as mayor. In many ways, it was the end of an era. Skramstad and Young were active participants in the liberal social movements that had changed the world of higher education, America's historical culture, and politics. The following years would mark a period of more financial struggle for the Village and for Detroit. Chapter Five will examine the Village today and consider the role it continues to play in defining the metro-area landscape.

CHAPTER FIVE

From History Museum to History Attraction (1996-2006)

Borrowing ideas from theme-park attractions like Disney World and Sea World, the redesigned Greenfield Village has the look and feel of the real deal—a destination that inspires, educates, and entertains while leaving an indelible impression.⁶¹⁴

Frank Provenzano in *The Detroit Free Press*, 2003

In 2002 Greenfield Village closed for renovation and reinvention (see Figure 5.1). Under the guidance of Steve Hamp, who replaced Harold K. Skramstad, and Bill Ford, newly elected chairman of the board's Finance Committee and Hamp's brother in-law, the site was rebranded a "History Attraction." Hamp told reporters that there were "two significant moments" in the site's history, "the founding of the Village and the reinvention of this place."⁶¹⁵ Fittingly, the Village had offered inspiration for Disney's theme park, and now, the theme park returned the favor. Ideal tourist destinations not only educated, but inspired, entertained, and made lasting memories not by displaying America's material past in quiet halls and glass cases, but through exciting, interactive experiences. While historical authenticity may have been desirable, professionals at the Village argued that equally, if not more important, was the museum's ability to entertain. But in many ways, this had long been the goal of many historic sites and museums, especially ones funded by private organizations. The methods and goals of private history

⁶¹⁴ Frank Provenzano, "The Future of History—Visitors Will Find a Reengineered, Well-Organized Walk Through the American Experience," *The Detroit Free Press*, June 8, 2003, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid.



Figure 5.1: Map of the Village in 2008, after the reinvention. “Greenfield Village Map,” *The Henry Ford: America’s Greatest History Attraction*, 2008, <http://www.hfmvgv.org/village/map.asp>.

museums lay, by design and economic necessity, in the interstices of the simultaneous pursuits of knowledge, finance, and entertainment.

Hamp's alterations, then, did not necessarily reinvent the Village, despite his assertions. Certainly Skramstad's additions to the site forever altered its interpretive scope and approach, bringing a scholastic flavor to the buildings located on its landscape, particularly through the addition of the Firestone working farm and the reinterpretation of the Mattox House and Hermitage Slave Quarters. But the Hamp administration's reinterpretation, in part, returned the museum to Ford's original vision. What patrons encountered at the reinvented site was an interpretation of the American past that was sometimes grounded in historical research, sometimes not. The effort to form a narrative around the pastiche of buildings and stories that made sense to scholars was not abandoned, but it was no longer the administration's first priority.

This last chapter considers how the site has functioned since 1996 by tracing contemporary attitudes regarding representations of the past in the latter half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, shifts in the Detroit metro-area, and the changing Village. It also draws on interviews with staff and patrons conducted during the summer of 2004 to ask and attempt to answer the question of how visitors use and understand the site today. Throughout the late 1990s, Detroit experienced significant growth in its tourist economy, and the Village benefited. In many ways, the Village also achieved its goal of increasing attendance by the metro-area black community, particularly as local historical memories of Oral Hubbard dissipated. But there is evidence that the landscape and politics of white flight and populist conservatism continue to shape encounters with the Village. Dearborn's newly elected mayor Michael Guido supported political policies

that encouraged de facto segregation and often expressed openly racist views. Further, the politics of populism so deeply embedded in the Village landscape made consciousness-raising through techniques of personalization at the site's African American buildings a challenge. This chapter ends with a discussion of the limits and possibilities of representing scholarly views of the past at history museums and suggests some potential solutions.

Museums at the Turn of the 21st Century

The culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s have continued into the 21st century, but academics have made significant strides in adding scholarly approaches and evidence to public representations of the past. For many scholars, the story of public intellectualism is one of declension; once consulted and respected by various publics, many argue that academics are no longer active participants in popular political, social, and economic discourse, for example.⁶¹⁶ But evidence suggests that while scholarly worldviews and public views are often at odds, public historians have altered the interpretation and construction of historic sites, museums, and monuments; they have inserted their knowledge into public histories.

Perhaps the most striking example of the success of academic struggles to add the voices of people of color to the historic landscape is the Smithsonian Institution's addition of a National Museum of the American Indian and the planned construction of a

⁶¹⁶ See Richard Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) and Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

museum devoted to depicting the history and culture of America's black citizenry.⁶¹⁷ After the Civil War, black Civil War veterans proposed a site on the national mall that would document the contributions of black Americans. Almost ninety years later, in 2003, Congress passed legislation supporting the initiative. The National Museum of African American History and Culture will cost more than \$400 million to build. Its narrative will cover 400 years of black American history, from the arrival of enslaved peoples in the colonies on slave ships through the Harlem Renaissance, and the civil rights movement. Although the museum will not be located on the mall, as some had hoped, the decision to construct such an institution marks a significant shift in the public display of who and what counts as American history.⁶¹⁸

In fact, across the country, museums devoted to depicting the lives of America's diverse population opened during the late-1990s through the early 21st century. The National Parks Service was on the forefront of reinterpreting or adding historic sites reflecting the nation's multicultural past. Administrators at the Manzanar National Historic Site in Independence, California, for example, opened a new interpretive center in 2004 to more accurately portray the story of America's internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.⁶¹⁹ And today, the National Parks website lists a series of travel itineraries such as "We Shall Overcome: Historic Places of the Civil Rights

⁶¹⁷ Renwick McLean, "Congress Backs New Museum on Black History and Culture," *The New York Times*, November 23, 2003 <http://www.lexisnexisacademic.com>.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Kimber Edds, "New Museum Revives Painful Memories for Internees," *The Washington Post*, April 26, 2004, <http://www.lexisnexisacademic.com>.

Movement,” “Aboard the Underground Railroad,” “Indian Mounds of Mississippi,” and “Places Where Women Made History: Featuring Massachusetts and New York.”⁶²⁰

Museums with a progressive bent focused on communicating their messages through techniques like personalization, which combined empathy and connection building to raise visitor’s cultural and historical awareness. Skramstad was one proponent of this method. In 1999, three years after retiring as president of the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, he described the museum professional’s goal in the new millennia as one of “inreach.” He wrote:

Up to now much of their [museums] time has been devoted to building their collections and sharing them through “outreach” to the larger world. Now they must help us create the new world of “inreach,” in which people, young and old alike, can “reach in” to museums through experiences that will help give value and meaning to their own lives and at the same time stretch and enlarge their perceptions of the world.⁶²¹

At the Village, the familiarity and typicality of the buildings and objects ensured that visitors had long made connections between the past and their own lives. But this did not guarantee that patrons left the Village with a different perspective on the past. As a discussion of interviews with patrons and visitors later in this chapter demonstrates, the very personal nature of the Village experience may, in fact, impede efforts by presenters and administrators to expand the worldviews of various audiences.

Interest in the preservation movement also grew throughout the late 1990s, particularly through the National Main Street program. Consequently, preservationists continued to straddle both sides of the political fence as they worked to preserve urban

⁶²⁰ “National Register Travel Itineraries,” *National Park Service*, 2008, <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/travel/onlineitin-trav.htm>.

⁶²¹ Harold K. Skramstad, “An Agenda for Museums in the Twenty-First Century,” in Gail Anderson, ed., *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* (New York: Altamira Press, 2004), 132.

pasts and vernacular architecture while simultaneously supporting preservation for commercial gain. In this arena and in privately funded museums, the “bottom-line” often made the display of traumatic and painful pasts a difficult task. The problems that museum professionals face in using personalization as an interpretive technique are reflected in the difficulties encountered by preservationists. Various publics often support preservation because they find historic architecture appealing; it connects to their desires for an imagined past or an alternative future. But these desires rarely include ones that recognize injustices, failures, or limitations.

The Preservation Movement at the Turn of the 21st Century

Restored downtowns and Main Streets that target shoppers by offering not only products but an alternative experience naturally encourage an idealized vision of America trapped in an imagined time. Main Street programs celebrate not only the independent, local business, but also suggest that before suburbia, Americans were united by positive community celebrations, traditions, and rituals. Preservationists’ equation of small towns with utopia have found their way into contemporary architecture movements such as New Urbanism, which calls for a return to designs of the past as a means of reshaping modern life.

In 2000, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Speck’s book *Suburban Nation: the Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, outlined the links between architectural styles and community development. The book compared two models of urban growth: the traditional neighborhood and suburban sprawl. Suburban

growth, they argued, promoted inorganic expansion that responded to artificial needs. Although sprawl is organized and predictable, they contend that it cannot pay for itself, that it unnecessarily destroys the environment, and that it does not promote a satisfactory lifestyle. Indeed, they claimed, suburbia was responsible for a multitude of economic, social, and cultural problems facing Americans. Duany and his colleagues argued for a return to the traditional neighborhood, one with a center that emphasized walking, the mixed-use of buildings, increased density, and public space.⁶²²

There was no better example of suburban sprawl than the Detroit metropolitan-area. Ironically, what Duany and others envisioned as an architectural style that would revitalize crumbling downtowns like Detroit could also be used to further separate suburban enclaves from pre-existing urban centers. In 1997, Dearborn used New Urbanism architectural styles to recapture the city's origins as a small town. Judy Rose reported that New Urbanism had arrived in metro Detroit through the construction of West Village in Dearborn. Seventy-six stacked condo units were built and placed between Michigan Avenue's retail strip and the railroad tracks located two blocks south. Rose wrote: "Could this really be a place where people want to live? Dearborn residents have voted 'yes' with their checkbooks." In three days the 76 units sold out and to show their support of the project, the city council allowed 51 variances from Dearborn building ordinances:

When it's finished, the streetscape will be a critical component, small and personal with a village-like flavor: awnings on the stores, outdoor benches, planters, a gazebo, space for a sidewalk art fair -- everything scaled for viewing

⁶²² Albert Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Jeff Speck, *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream* (North Point Press: New York, 2000).

on foot. Details were suggested by Dearborn's Greenfield Village... red brick, limestone trim, lanterns, traditional design.⁶²³

Dearborn's West Village is emblematic of how representations of the past became increasingly commercial enterprises stripped of complicated messages. New Urbanism embodies this ideal; these architectural designs and neighborhood plans are reminiscent of the past but do not have histories of their own. Consequently, difficult local histories are easily forgotten. No one noted, for example, that Dearborn's rigorous set of building ordinances was tied to its long history of segregation policies. Rose continued that:

The point, say the New Urbanists, is that the greedy, land-gobbling habits we developed in the past 40 years no longer suit our lives. They have pushed us into the isolation of far-out suburbs. The cost is too hard on our psyche, too ruinous to the environment and too expensive for our communities, which must continually pay for new infrastructure.⁶²⁴

New Urbanists suggested that suburban sprawl was tied to greed and materialism, but failed to recognize that the success of sprawl was also clearly linked to white flight. New Urbanism offered an answer for the many whites who had moved from Detroit's inner-city to the outskirts of the metropolitan area and found its bland architecture and lack of public space hard on their psyches, while simultaneously encouraging the already grave disconnect between the suburbs and the urban core of Detroit.

By the mid-1990s, however, the demographics of Dearborn had shifted significantly. What was once an almost completely white community was now home to the nation's largest Arab-American population. And, as the 1990s came to a close,

⁶²³ Judy Rose, "Right in the Thick of Things with Its Clustered Housing, Shops and Offices, Dearborn's West Village Recaptures the Urban America of Generations Past," *The Detroit Free Press*, October 26, 1997, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

Detroit continued its efforts to rehabilitate downtown and bring wealthier residents back into the center of the city. Many decaying buildings were rehabilitated or destroyed and former business offices were rebuilt or redesigned as condos with either an historic or modern feel.

Another component of the effort to rehabilitate not only the city of Detroit, but also the metro-area, focused on marketing it as a tourist destination. The Village became one of those sites advertised to potential vacationers in Southeast Michigan. The following section examines the shifts that occurred in the Detroit metro-area between 1996 and 2006 as a means of better understanding contemporary uses of the Village.

Race, Ethnicity, and Place in the Detroit Metro-Area (1996-2004)

During the late 1990s, there were signs that Detroit was finally emerging from economic decline. In 1996, General Motors purchased the Renaissance Center for \$73 million and said it would move its white-collar jobs to the riverfront. The purchase shocked many. For the first time in decades, a company moved white-collar jobs into the city instead of out of it. Property values subsequently rose in many Detroit neighborhoods and nearby suburbs. That same year, the *Detroit Free Press* reported that tourism was up: 15 million in 1996 as compared to 11.4 million in 1992.⁶²⁵

In 1997, construction began on Comerica Park, a new baseball stadium to replace Tiger stadium and draw more tourists to the city. Casinos also dotted the riverfront. Both

⁶²⁵ Mark Stryker, "Culture for Sale Detroit is Spreading the Word About Its Arts and Entertainment Offerings in Hopes of Drawing More Tourists and Dollars," *The Detroit Free Press*, June 29, 1997, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

projects were initiated by Coleman Young, who died of respiratory failure that year, and were carried out by newly elected mayor Dennis Archer. Other additions to the cityscape included a redesigned and expanded Museum of African American History, a renovated Detroit Opera Theater, a restored Fox theater, and a revitalized Detroit Riverfront that included new pricey marinas and upscale housing development projects.⁶²⁶

By 2000, tourism rates jumped again. The Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau reported that the number of business people, conventioners, and tourists in Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties increased to 16.9 million in 1999 and those visitors to the area spent a total of \$4.48 billion. Larry Alexander, president and chief officer of the convention and visitors bureau linked the increase to attractions such as the Great Lakes Crossing, the changes at the Detroit Zoo, Comerica Park, and the construction of several casinos. According to the report, the Museum and Village accounted for 10% of the region's out-of-state visitors, coming in fourth after Greektown, the Renaissance Center, and Cobo Center events. The tourism industry also brought 72,000 new jobs to southeast Michigan.⁶²⁷

Despite an improvement in the city's image, particularly as more tourists chose downtown and the metro-area as a destination, the suburbs seemed irrevocably marked as spaces of racism and ethnic conflict. In 1997, Michael A. Guido was in his third term as Dearborn's mayor and he continued to remain a controversial figure in the African American and Arab American communities. In December, NAACP leaders staged a much publicized protest at a city-owned golf course after allegations by black employees

⁶²⁶ Jon Gallagher, Jennifer Dixon, and Joe Swickard, "His Efforts Set the Stage for Rebirth of His City," *The Detroit Free Press*, November 30, 1997, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁶²⁷ Daniel G. Fricker, "Tourism Grows in Detroit Region: Visitors Spend More," *The Detroit Free Press*, June 21, 2000, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

that they had been mistreated. Black motorists also charged that Dearborn police stopped them unfairly and black shoppers claimed that they remained unwelcome at Fairlane Town Center. Guido firmly denied charges that he and his administration were racist. “If I dislike someone,” he told reporter Beth Krodel, “it’s not because I’m a racist, it’s because there’s something about their character that I don’t like.” Guido also told Krodel that he felt he had done his part after the NAACP filed charges. His staff questioned golf-course employees and found no evidence of wrongdoing, and a survey of traffic tickets issued indicated that one quarter went to African Americans, a percent he found consistent with the number that drove through Dearborn. Reverend Wendell Anthony, president of the Detroit Branch of the NAACP, however, faulted Guido for not taking the charges seriously.⁶²⁸

Guido also continued to attack the city’s Arab American population. In 1999, during a city council meeting, a resident of the south end and a member of the Concerned Residents of South Dearborn asked the mayor to explain what they perceived as his neglect of their community, which was largely Arab American. Guido responded: “If your organization wanted to do something, you should work on trying to train the immigrants to this country on personal hygiene and habits of cleanliness.” He defended the comment by arguing that it did not differ from what service agencies and government officials teach all immigrants.⁶²⁹

The mayor’s relationship with the city’s Arab American population came to a head shortly after September 11, 2001 during that year’s mayoral election. His opponent

⁶²⁸ Beth Krodel, “People’s Choice Blacks and Arabs Have Called Him a Racist. But Dearborn’s Mayor Remains a Political Juggernaut,” *The Detroit Free Press*, March 31, 1997, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁶²⁹ Niraj Warikoo, “Sept. 11 May Have Left an Imprint on Mayoral Contest in Dearborn—Some See Ethnicity as Factor in Race,” *The Detroit Free Press*, October 31, 2001, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

was Abed Hammoud, an Arab American. By 2001, 30% of Dearborn's 97,000 residents identified themselves as Arab American. Hammoud was an assistant Wayne County prosecutor and tried to avoid questions of ethnicity by focusing his campaign on budget concerns, but his heritage became a primary issue as media pundits and locals pondered the significance of the city's large population of Arab American citizens given the terrorist attacks. Surprisingly, Guido appealed to Arab Americans during the campaign, visiting mosques and courting their votes at fundraisers. In November, Guido successfully won a fifth term with 79% of the vote, and he continued to serve as Dearborn's mayor until his death in 2006.⁶³⁰

Despite considerable efforts to rehabilitate Detroit's public image, issues of race continued to shape urban and suburban politics. Still, white politicians were increasingly forced to recognize the political power of people of color, particularly as they too moved out of downtown and into suburban residences. At the Village, administrators sustained efforts to interpret the lives of enslaved peoples, but they also worked hard to tap into the metro-area's growing tourist industry by reinventing the Village yet again, this time with both educational and entertainment goals in mind.

Reinventing the Village: 1998-2002

In 1998 Steve Hamp announced the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village's \$40 million improvement campaign. The campaign began 20 months earlier as

⁶³⁰ Niraj Warikoo, "Guido is Re-Elected Mayor—His Arab American Rival Drew National Media's Attention," *The Detroit Free Press*, November 7, 2001, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

staff and administration collected pledges from the museum board (between \$2 million and \$3 million), members of the Ford family (\$10 million), the Ford Motor Co. (\$5.8 million), the Knight Foundation (\$1 million) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (\$2 million). The Kresge Foundation in neighboring Troy also donated a \$2 million challenge grant. These diverse institutions reflected the administrators' simultaneously educational and entertainment goals. By April of 1998, the Museum and Village had raised \$32.5 million. Hamp explained to reporter David Lyman that the funds would be funneled into several projects including adding air conditioning at the Henry Ford Museum and in some of the buildings in the Village, upgrading the lighting throughout the Village, revitalizing the Village Green and the train system, enlarging the Museum's research center, expanding the site's charter school (the Henry Ford Academy), and developing an Internet-based education program.⁶³¹

Perhaps the most obvious addition to the Museum and Village complex, and the one that best symbolized how alternations sought to reinvent the site as a clear mix of entertainment and education, was the opening of an IMAX theater in the Museum. Hamp told reporters that, "We're making a concerted institution-wide attack on the basic nature of the experience in the village and the museum." He continued, "Think of a Disney World with real, authentic, path-breaking exhibitions." Other alterations focused on adding more entertainment aspects to the Village; a new Model-T ride embodied the mix of Disney World and history museum that Hamp envisioned. In an article covering the IMAX opening, Lyman noted that during Skramstad's presidency, visitors were often disgruntled by the massive changes he implemented: "longtime patrons believed his

⁶³¹ David Lyman, "Improvements Will Make Henry Ford Museum a Cooler Place to Visit," *The Detroit Free Press*, April 15, 1998, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

attempts to make the museum more accessible were changing ‘their’ museum.” Although administrators like Mary Lynn Heninger, director of program research and development, recognized that these changes, too, would likely elicit similar responses, she asserted that the “mission of the museum is not just to serve the specialists.” “You want them,” she continued, “but the additional purpose is to evoke interest and curiosity and maybe even passion in the people who don’t know about it yet.” The changes were based in part on research indicating that only 24.7% of the institution’s patrons were less than 25 years old, 43% less than the population at large. The shifting landscape of the museum reflected a broader desire to change the Museum and Village reputation, while simultaneously expanding a patronage that was by now recognized as largely local.⁶³²

Reporters wrote that the administration’s decision to undertake such an expensive enterprise was surprising. Previously, alterations and improvement programs had been conservative in financial scope. Others familiar with the managerial styles and personalities of Hamp and Bill Ford were unfazed. Maureen Martin, director of development, said that the men were alike in terms of their intelligence and their willingness to take risks. As brothers-in-law, the two had a 20-year friendship. Hamp described Ford as an “active impatient guy,” who “wants it all now,” and inspired the same response in those around him. Ford called Hamp a “visionary.”⁶³³

In September of 2002, the Village closed for eight months to spend \$15 million on new roads, sewers, sidewalks, and a new communication and electrical system. Christian Overland, the Village’s director, explained that the changes would serve as the

⁶³² David Lyman, “Museum Modernizing the Past Ima Theatre Part of New Henry Ford,” *The Detroit Free Press*, November 15, 1999, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

“foundation for the future.” He continued, “It’ll be easier for visitors to get around, and with these improvements we can hold more events and programs.”⁶³⁴ At the same time, they reduced their staff by 6% by cutting 19 positions in response to 2001’s lower attendance rate of 1.36 million, a 17% decrease from 2000. Hamp explained that although the site had a rough year, most cultural organizations around the country were suffering after September 11; Americans were financially strapped and reluctant to travel.⁶³⁵

Many alterations focused on the landscape. Confusing or outdated signage was removed and unclear directions were replaced with clear markers. The Village areas were divided into seven theme districts and nine of the buildings were moved to complement that alteration. There were other changes, however, that were more indicative of a shift in the site’s purposes and goals. A new 20-foot-tall wrought-iron entrance gate and brick columns topped with sculpted pineapples welcomed visitors, along with a new ticket booth and expanded parking (see Figure 5.2). Once inside the gates, visitors encountered Josephine Ford Plaza, which featured an expanded store, sculptures, and a fountain. The dirt paths and asphalt walkways were replaced with paved roads and sidewalks. Indoor heating was added to several buildings as well. Patrons would no longer be forced to experience the same environmental conditions that previous Americans had endured. Yet Christian Overland, director of the Village argued that the site’s mandate was to be “authentic, and as historically accurate as possible.” He continued by explaining that, “We’re not a simulated or fabricated experience. This is what it felt

⁶³⁴ Frank Provenzano, “Greenfield Village to Shut for Major Changes,” *The Detroit Free Press*, June 14, 2002, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁶³⁵ Frank Provenzano, “Greenfield Village Jobs Cut—Restructuring is Response to Decline in Attendance,” *The Detroit Free Press*, January 9, 2002, <http://www.newsbank.com>.



Figure 5.2: The new wrought iron at Greenfield Village. Photo by author, 2006.

like to be living at a previous time in history.”⁶³⁶ The Village reopened during the summer of 2003. The visitor to the reinvented site found concrete streets and new options for entertainment and education. The site’s new themed districts reflected the site’s duality: “Henry Ford’s Model-T,” which included an 8-minute ride in an authentic Model-T; “Liberty Craftworks,” where the gristmill was revamped; “Edison at Work” which encompassed the buildings paying homage to Edison; “Main Street,” where actors now performed a short play based on Orville and Wilbur Wright’s return to their Ohio bicycle shop after the successful flight at Kitty Hawk; “Working Farms,” which incorporated the Henry Ford birthplace and the Firestone Farm; “Porches and Parlors,” which also featured the Mattox House and the Hermitage Quarters; and “Railroad Junction.”⁶³⁷

The site’s new restaurants and special events embodied the administration’s desire to shift the Village’s image from history museum to history attraction. Along with the Eagle Tavern, which focused on historic foodways, attendants could also eat at the Taste of History Restaurant, which obviously blurred the line between past and present. The building featured a cafeteria and offered a mix of historic and contemporary fare. For example, the “Hobo’s Lunch,” comprised of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, goldfish crackers, an apple, and a cookie, and packaged in a red bandana that hangs on a stick, invited children to “play hobo” as they encountered various historic exhibits and buildings (see Figure 5.3). New special events included reenactments not only of enslavement, but also of nineteenth century baseball games featuring the site’s very own team: the Greenfield Village La De Dahs (see Figure 5.4).

⁶³⁶ Provenzano, “The Future of History.”

⁶³⁷ Ibid.



Figure 5.3: Children pick out their Hobo's lunch at the Taste of History restaurant. Photo by author, 2006



Figure 5.4: Patrons watch a nineteenth-century style baseball game featuring the Greenfield Village Lah Dee Dahs. Photo by author, 2006.

Throughout the Village's reinvention, however, administrators and staff continued to support the African American Family Life and Culture Program. In February of 2000, as part of Black History month, the site invited Howard Paige, who had recently completed a book titled *Aspects of African American Foodways* to prepare African American dishes throughout the month. His presentations included a discussion of the ways in which African Americans shaped American cuisine.⁶³⁸ One year later, the site held its now annual Emancipation Day celebration. Among the participants were members of the 102nd U.S. Colored Troops Civil War reenactment group. The troops stationed themselves near the Scotch Settlement School and chatted with patrons about local history.⁶³⁹ Today the Emancipation Celebration continues as one of the site's cornerstone special events.

In 2005, 57 year-old Steven K. Hamp resigned his post at the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village and joined the Ford Motor Company as vice president and chief of staff to then CEO Bill Ford. He was replaced by Patricia Mooradian, the first woman president of the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. Mooradian was an inside hire. Hamp recruited her in 1999 and she had alternately served as the institution's vice president of program and marketing and then chief operating officer. She also witnessed the opening of the Benson Ford Research Center, located in the Henry Ford Museum, the restoration of the Village, and the addition of a Rouge Factory Tour in 2004. When she took the reins, Hamp's efforts to reinvent the site had in many ways met with limited success in terms of increasing visitorship.

⁶³⁸ Sylvia Rector, "Cuisine is a Nod to the Past," *The Detroit Free Press*, February 9, 2000.

⁶³⁹ Desiree Cooper, "Group Keeps Black Troops' History Alive," *The Detroit Free Press*, July 31, 2003, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

Daily attendance was still down 15% compared to 2004. Four percent of the 300-person staff was laid off and several positions were left permanently unfilled. But Mooradian remained hopeful and was particularly enthusiastic about the site's special events such as "Holiday Nights" and "Halloween." Moradian said she would continue to add exhibitions and features with a mass appeal.⁶⁴⁰

How did the changes instituted by Hamp and his supporting staff affect the visitor experience? How does the contemporary patron encounter, use, and understand the Village landscape? One of the most promising means of understanding how the site's goals of entertainment and education are balanced and their effect on visitors is to consider them in the context in which they are presented.

A Virtual Tour of the Village: 2004

It is of course not administrators, but presenters who interact most directly with visitors. A museum presenter faces a particularly challenging task. Unlike educators in a classroom, they do not have the same kind of time available to spend with their "students" or power to shape their futures; there are no grades, no tests, and no follow-up discussions. In the museum setting, patrons play several roles: they are simultaneously students, tourists, and family members, for example. Presenters are lucky, then, to find visitors willing to stand still for more than three minutes and unencumbered by tired children or beleaguered friends and relatives. As both educators and entertainers, presenters at the Village explained that upon encountering a patron, their first goal is to

⁶⁴⁰ Provenzano, "The Future of History."

figure out why they are at the site, so that they can and they shape their interpretation accordingly. Interestingly, then, it is in large part the visitor who shapes presentation. And further, one of the most direct routes to understanding the visitor experience, then, is to ask those who most frequently encounter them.

In the summer of 2004, I spent a week shadowing and interviewing Village presenters.⁶⁴¹ Interviews were conducted with presenters in the historic district where they were working. In general, presenters identified visitors by their purpose in coming to the site, their relationship to the Village, and their relationship with history. Perhaps most striking is the high number of presenters who visited the Village as children and enjoyed their experience so much that they returned as employees. Certainly, applicants for the presenter position are likely more attractive employees if they have such a relationship with the Village, but this also speaks to the multiple layers of nostalgia operating at the site. This section functions as a virtual tour of the Village. Over the course of interviews in the site's various historic districts, the motivations of presenters and visitors are clarified. These communications often highlight the complex ways in which nostalgia functions at the Village, not only as a longing for the past, but in terms of desires for unrealized futures.

Henry Ford's Model-T

The "Model-T" district is one of the newest additions to the Village landscape. In this area, patrons are offered rides in restored Model-Ts and Model-As. Presenters' tasks

⁶⁴¹ Some presenters asked that I use their first names only.

are two-fold: to provide visitors with some historical information about Ford's first automobiles and to give patrons an overview of the site's buildings. The buildings included in the district are the Bagley Avenue Workshop, Ford's home, a reconstruction of Ford's first Motor Company, the Henry Ford Theater, which was once the workshop that Ford built for his son Edsel, and the Miller School, which Ford attended when he was 9 years-old. The Museum and Village website describes the Model-T district experience:

Trace the life of Henry Ford, one of America's greatest industrialists and innovators, from childhood through the founding of his Ford Motor Company. Move from the home where he was born to a replica of the factory where he built his first automobiles. You can even take a test ride in a restored Model T!⁶⁴²

Phil is a former fire chief who now works at the Village in the Model-T. During a sample ride Phil noted that the Model-T he was driving was a replica of the 1914 version, today worth \$250,000. As he explained how the car worked, he also pointed out several buildings including the George Washington Carver House, the Stephen Foster House, the Noah Webster House and the Swiss chalet. Phil also mentioned that he visited the Village as a child. After the sample tour, I accompanied Phil and two white female visitors on a ride. Cheryl and Julie were visiting the site with their two children. For most of the ride they remained silent, listening carefully to what Phil said about the Model-T and the Village buildings. Near the end, however, Cheryl said that she "grew up coming to the Village," and that her favorite building was the "pink one with the flowers." "I love to go and sit and look at the magnolias. It's very relaxing." She said that now, she brings her children to the Village, who she thinks take it for granted. Julie also came to the Village as a child during a school trip, but said that she had not been back in six or seven years.

⁶⁴² The Henry Ford, "Henry Ford's Model-T," The Henry Ford, <http://www.hfmgv.org/village/henryfordsmodelt/default.asp>.

Both Cheryl and Julie agreed that the Village is a wonderful place where their children can learn about history.

Don was another presenter working in the Model-T section, although he had been doing so for only a few months. Don is a retired businessman who recently discovered that his grandfather Frank used to run a Ford Motor Company shop. Don believes that people come to the Village because it gives them the chance to “slow down.” Today, Don says, people “don’t have front porches and talk to their neighbors.” “They hire people to water their lawns,” and they don’t engage in neighborhood activities. Don continues that he does not know many of his own neighbors. When I asked whether Don sees a relationship between the Village and Detroit, he responded that it is an “attraction.” He says that the riots changed everything because no one wanted to go downtown afterwards; the Village brings tourists to Detroit despite the negative reputation of downtown. But, he also believes that things are getting better and that the image of downtown is slowly changing.

Paul Labadie also works in the “Model-T” district. Labadie grew up in the metro-area and said that the Logan County Courthouse had a strong impact on him as a child. While working in Washington D.C. as an editorialist for *USA Today*, Labadie said he dreamed of returning to Michigan and working at the Village in his retirement. Labadie then said that one week earlier a male patron asked him to stop in front of the Edison building. The visitor said that his trip to the Village as a young boy had inspired a lifelong interest in Edison and contributed to his decision to become a physician. Paul said that if he ever affected “one kid in that way” he would be happy.

Main Street

Twenty-two buildings comprise the Main Street district including the Ford home, the Village Green and its surrounding buildings, and the Wright Brothers' Home and Cycle Shop. This area, then, includes what many of the presenters view as the most popular buildings at the site. The Henry Ford web site invites visitors to:

Stroll down this busy thoroughfare and encounter a bustling place of automobiles and carriages, events and amusements. Discover the center of community and commerce from the J. R. Jones General Store and Mrs. Cohen's Millinery to the Logan County Courthouse brimming with American history and heritage.⁶⁴³

Like the presenters at "Henry Ford's Model-T," the guides in this section often have a long history with the site extending to their childhood. For example, at Mrs. Cohen's Millinery, patrons explore nineteenth century hats and jewelry, so the focus of the presentation is clearly on objects. Mary Ann Muldoone has been a presenter at Mrs. Cohen's Millinery for 14 years. Muldoone started working at the Village because she "loved history" and because she had fond memories of her visits to the site as a child. Muldoone describes visitors as: "the ones who love history," and "the ones that are looking for something to do." She explains that she has gotten good at "reading visitors by focusing on the way that they react" to her. At this site, however, where Muldoone works in costume, patrons are often more interested in perusing the objects than interacting with the presenter.

At the Wright Brothers' Cycle Shop, patrons encounter a recreation of the turn-of-the century cycle shop. Pamela Anderson often works in this building. Anderson

⁶⁴³ The Henry Ford, "Main Street," The Henry Ford, <http://www.hfmv.org/village/mainstreet/default.asp>.

describes herself as shy. She has worked at the Village for fifteen years, including the seven years that she also attended the Village schools. Anderson has many positive memories of her time at the Village and explains that she learned many of her skills in reading people, which she claims is essential for effective interpretation, while working as a greeter. As a greeter, Anderson wore period clothing and walked the Village streets providing visitors with directions or information if they asked. As a presenter, Anderson says that she draws on her mother's stories to make connections with visitors. Anderson also took time to comment on the reactions of visitors to the renovations. She noticed that some patrons were disappointed. But, she believed that Ford would have made the same changes. "You have to change with the times," she says, "You have to improve your infrastructure."

Jonathan Shafer also works at many of the "Main Street" buildings, and at "Edison Works." Shafer is a college student and says that he loves any book that analyzes Ford. Shafer grew up in Dearborn and this is his second summer working for the site. He works here, like many other presenters, because he has fond memories of coming to the Village—particularly of riding the train—as a child; his mother actually attended the Village schools. Shafer also expressed concerns about the decrease in attendance, which he believes cannot be completely attributed to the rise in gas prices or the general decline in tourism. Like many of the patrons, Shafer misses the dirt roads and the old feel of the Village and wonders if this might be contributing to the lower attendance rates. Shafer's concerns about the decline in attendance are also reflective of the way in which the Village has its own history and provokes personal memories that are laden with nostalgia.

Gary works at the J.R. Jones General Store and has done so for five years but he also occasionally works in the Wright Brothers' home. Gary retired from the Ford Motor Company and is a self-described "history buff." He, like so many of the presenters at the site, also has a personal connection to it because his wife attended the Village schools. Gary, too, has personal memories of the Village that inform his relationship to the site.

Edison at Work

The "Edison at Work District" contains the Village buildings devoted to depicting the working life and inventive accomplishments of Thomas Edison. It includes the Sarah Jordan Boarding House, Thomas Edison's Fort Myers Laboratory, Edison's Menlo Park laboratory, his glass shed, machine shop, and park office and laboratory. During the 1960s and 1970s, this district was identified as the third most popular Village area in visitor surveys and presenters claim that this district continues to be one of the most popular. At "Edison at Work," patrons can:

See the great inventor's Menlo Park complex at the moment when his development of the incandescent light bulb was about to transform the world. You will see the actual workplaces that gave birth to Edison's extraordinary innovations, and the first buildings to be illuminated by his amazing electric light.⁶⁴⁴

Rick Vaughn has worked at the Village for three seasons and during the summer of 2004 he presented in Menlo Park. For Vaughn, working at the site is a family business. At one point in time he, his wife, and his stepson were working at the Village. His

⁶⁴⁴ The Henry Ford, "Edison at Work," The Henry Ford, <http://www.hfmgv.org/village/edisonatwork/default.asp>.

stepson Jason continues to work there as a stroller, one of the men and women who dress in late nineteenth century garb and walk the streets providing information and atmosphere to visitors. Vaughn believes that patrons come to see the Village because it is a “landmark” and because it offers a “vast introspective view.” Vaughn identifies the most common question asked as: “what made the person want to do this?” Visitor interest in the motivation of inventors and folk heroes such as Edison ties into the nostalgia for unrealized futures that teems on the Village landscape. In effect, this question reflects a desire to understand the differences and similarities between the patron and the historical figure, perhaps in the hopes that they can explain the life trajectory of the patron.

The Sarah Jordan Boarding House mixes preservation with reconstruction to depict the turn-of-the century boarding house where Edison and his men took their meals and often slept. Wayne James, who often presents there, has worked at the Village for 2.5 years. When James was laid off, he and his son came to the job fair. James explains that he used to bring his children to the site and had fond memories of learning about the Wright Brothers’ accomplishments and about electricity. According to James, it is the “older people who are more interested in history.” The field trips “get children interested,” but what you really hope, James says, is that they return someday with their families.

Anora Zeiler also presents at the Sarah Jordan and has worked at the site for 5.5 years. After retiring, she wanted to stay active and her fond memories of visiting the Village as a young girl led her to apply for a position at the Village. She remembers the Suwanee River, playing games on the Village Green, and the horse and carriage rides.

Zeiler believes that visitors come to the site because they have a desire to learn more about their personal pasts.

Working Farms

The Firestone farm buildings have now been renamed “Working Farms” and include the carriage barn, cider mill, Firestone farm, the Richart Wagon Shop, the soybean experimental laboratory, stony creek, and the William Ford barn. The district is described in the following way on the Museum and Village website:

The soul of 19th-century America comes alive, with horse-drawn wagons, livestock and fields of ripening vegetables and grain in scenes straight from the nation’s agricultural revolution. At Firestone Farm, see living history presentations minus modern conveniences, from daily household chores to seasonal field work, demonstrating how people truly lived off the land.⁶⁴⁵

At the Firestone farm, presenters dress in period clothing and use third-person interpretation. They often discuss the house and the function that each room served as they are participating in traditional daily tasks such as canning peaches or preparing a meal.

Sisters Becky and Mandy have presented at the farm for three years. They were born and raised in Dearborn and always wanted to work at the Village. As they worked in the kitchen a mother told her daughter that her “grandmother would have lived in a house like the Firestone home.” One couple asked why a frame contained a lock of hair because their mother had one in her living room and no one knew ‘the history of it.’ Several

⁶⁴⁵ The Henry Ford, “Working Farms,” The Henry Ford, <http://www.hfmgv.org/village/workingfarms/default.asp>.

visitors made similar comments about the dishes such as “grandma has one of those,” or “my mother has one just like that.”

Becky explained that patrons often make comments like this one, confirming that for many visitors the desire to see familiar objects on display as history continues to shape their experience.

Outside, Mike Zimmerman and Paul Kondrat wore nineteenth-century period costumes and worked on the farm while chatting with a family of three. Zimmerman recently moved to Dearborn from San Diego where there “isn’t anything like the Village.” San Diego, he continued, has less history, or at least less history that you can see “in real life.” Zimmerman visited the site once on vacation and he loved his experience so much that he applied to work as a presenter.

Zimmerman said that visitors come to the Village for various reasons. He believes that “older folks are here to relive something they remember.” While parents come to the site because they, “have memories of their grandparents and want to teach it to their kids.” He explained that the site’s significant number of Amish visitors enjoys the Village because they like to see “stuff they used or use,” on display as history. One group made fun of Zimmerman for using a piece of farm equipment they found “outdated.” As Zimmerman described his theories about why visitors come to the Village, a family of three looked in the outhouse; the woman in the group said, “yeah, we got it pretty good.”

Kronrat, like Becky and Mandy, grew up in the area and came to the Village often as a child. Today, he is a second grade school teacher in Detroit during the year and works at the Village during the summer. Kronrat said that children come to the Village during the year with school groups, but that parents do not usually think to bring their

children to the site on their own. When families do visit, Krondat believes it is because parents feel that the Village is more educational than a theme park like Cedar Point. Zimmerman had a slightly different take on the frequency of parent-child visits to the site. He believes that the average visitor group is comprised of a mother and her child or children. Zimmerman then argued that it is important for children to come to the Village, because those memories bring them back when they are older. When asked why there seem to be so few African American visitors, Krondat replied that it is too costly, too far away, and that it takes too much time for inner city families to come.

Zimmerman explained that although the Ford home has a working farm component, the Firestone is “way more real.” He and Krondat often have to remember to explain that they are representing the way that the Firestone family lived daily life because visitors pay more attention to the work that they are engaging in and forget to ask about Firestone and his family. Both presenters think that visitors are more comfortable at the farm because they are dressed in period clothing. Uniforms, they suggest, draw a boundary between the presenter and the patron. Krondat also believes that the period clothing and their work at the farm give them more credibility. But Krondat’s opinion may be shaped by his own childhood experience; he remembers thinking that presenters who were in costume were more believable than presenters in uniform.

Porches and Parlors

The “Porches and Parlors,” district consists of about twenty buildings that include the birthplace of William Holmes McGuffey, the Swiss Chalet, Susquehanna Plantation,

the Mattox House and the Hermitage Slave Quarters. The Village web site invites visitors to:

See American homes and neighborhood settings, from humble early dwellings like the 1650s Plympton House and 1750s Daggett Farmhouse, to the 1840s Susquehanna Plantation and the 1930s Mattox House.⁶⁴⁶

In this district, Meeta and Louisa present at the Mattox House in costumes that 1930s tenant farmers would wear. As at the Firestone farm, meals are prepared and crops are tended to in this living-history component of the site. Meeta and Louisa are two of the very few African American presenters at the site.

Meeta explained the low attendance rate of African Americans in several ways. The first and most compelling reason, with which Louisa agreed, is Dearborn's long history as a racist community. Louisa said, "It's because of Mayor Hubbard. Hubbard is dead, but his son isn't." Meeta agreed. She pointed out that just five years earlier there was an unannounced boycott of Fairlane (the mall) because a young black man had been strangled to death by a security guard. Meeta said that neither she nor her friends go past Fairlane unless they're "passing through." Many of Meeta's friends also explained that they do not visit the Village because they "don't need to see that." They do not want to remember enslavement, nor do they want to remember the 1930s. Meeta said, "They tell me, 'I lived that.'" Louisa noted that even on Emancipation Proclamation weekend, when she brought several friends to see the performances, they were more interested in watching the baseball game. Meeta and Louisa also found that some of the white visitors are still prejudiced. This prejudice can be subtle or overt. Depending on the comment, they respond kindly, directly, or not at all. Yet, Meeta continues to work at the Village

⁶⁴⁶ The Henry Ford, "Porches and Parlors," The Henry Ford, <http://www.hfmgv.org/village/porchesandparlors/default.asp>.

despite the fact that she isn't making enough money. She said that she does it because most visitors who come to the village are "open." Meeta continues to "believe in the power of" her presentation to "change people's lives."

During the discussion, a white middle-aged couple entered the home. Meeta asked them where they were from and they explained that they were vacationing from Florida. She then launched into her presentation, explaining that the Mattox House was a poor family's home. The couple noted that in fact, the home reminded them of their grandmothers' homes, whose walls were also wallpapered with newspaper. During the discussion, Meeta forged a strong connection with the couple by focusing on the similarities between their childhood experiences and those of the Mattox family. At the conclusion of her presentation, the couple and the interpreters happily agreed that class could unite blacks and whites. Yet what was missing from Meeta's presentation was a discussion of the differences between being poor and white and poor and black. There was no talk of Jim Crow and the issue of racism was not raised. In fact, it would have likely ruined the moment, to bring such an unhappy truth into the conversation that ended with a feeling of unity.

Presenters Define Visitors

When asked why visitors come to the Village, several presenters answered by placing patrons into categories. Presenters often see visitors as "types." These types often reflect not only the presenter's view of the patron, however, but the multiple ways in which visitors use and encounter the past at the Village, their style of interaction with the presenters, and their motivation for visiting the site.

Don, who works in the “Model-T” district, identifies visitors as:

- history buffs
- Ford nuts
- people who like going back in time

It seems that a Ford nut could just as likely be categorized as a history buff, but a Ford nut is more specifically interested in Ford’s biography and mechanical accomplishments than general historical knowledge. The history buff and the person who likes going back in time also seem similar in motive and interest, but according to Don, the latter is motivated more by nostalgia than an interest in facts about the past.

When asked to describe the typical visitor to the Village, Pamela Anderson divides patrons into:

- School groups
- People who like to touch base with their kids
- Locals who walk here
- People who come here to appreciate what they have.
- People who come here and are surprised because they just come because they’ve heard about it but know nothing about it
- People who love history

Anderson’s list reflects the many diverse functions that the Village serves and the multiple nostalgias present on the landscape. The site is a community center, a tourist destination, and a space where visitors can both appreciate the past and the present.

Jonathan Shafer’s experience on Main Street was limited in comparison with other presenters, but he too categorizes visitors. For Shafer, patrons can be divided into:

- members
- families
- one-uppers

The member comes often and has a longstanding relationship with the Village. Certainly, a family could also be a member, but in this case Shafer is referring to families who live in the area and come infrequently, or who are visiting from out-of-state. The one-upper is motivated by a desire to contribute to a presenter's talk by adding the information that they know about, for example, Ford or Edison.

Gary, who also worked on Main Street said that visitors come to the site for the "live and in person" effect, because they have a passion or love of history, or because they have a coupon. He then revised these into categories of visitors who are:

really interested
bored
or bozos

Gary was, of course, half-joking when he called visitors bozos, referring to patrons who are unruly, or ask questions that Gary found annoying, but he accurately described the emotional experience of many visitors some of whom are engaged with the site and some who are not. In this way, his comments also illustrate the multi-layered experience of patrons.

The last presenter who placed visitors into categories is Anora Zeiler, who presents at Edison at Work. She defined patrons as:

schoolchildren
families
and internationals

The boundaries between visitors in Zeiler's categories are much clearer. In Zeiler's case, visitors are also defined by their purpose in coming to the site. Schoolchildren arrive because they are brought by their teachers, families come of their own accord, and

internationals are likely motivated by some broader goal associated with their decision to visit the United States. Zeiler's categories force the notion that visitors are a complex lot, motivated by different goals and desires. Still, the nature of encounters occurring between patrons and the objects and buildings at the Village are often embedded in various kinds of nostalgia, a relationship that is best explored through an analysis of comments made by visitors.

Visitors to the Village

Interviews with visitors were conducted during the week presenters were shadowed. Discussions with patrons focused primarily on the reasons for their visit, whether they were first-time visitors or returning visitors, and on which aspects of the Village they enjoyed the most. As presenters noted, visitors often fell into categories: those who were looking for something to do with their families and history buffs, for example. The way that they interpreted and used history, however, speaks to the multiple nostalgias that inform encounters with the past. For example, patrons often described their visit to the Village as part of a "family tradition." They had come as young people, and returned to recreate a similar experience with their own children. They longed to recreate their childhood experiences for their own sons and daughters. Visitors enjoyed seeing how people of the past lived for two reasons that were seemingly contradictory. Many found history pleasurable because it allowed them to appreciate what they had in the present, while others argued that the past offered a glimpse into a better time, when

Americans had a stronger sense of community and life was simpler. And still others held both of these views in mind.

Jim and Melanie arrived at the Village with their children for the Emancipation Celebration activities (see Figure 5.5). They live in nearby Farmington and use the Village as part of their home schooling curriculum. Melanie also has fond memories of riding the train as a young girl, so she says that visiting the Village has become a “family tradition.” Today, she enjoys the crafts, and Jim is a fan of the Roundhouse. Melanie and Jim agree that the Village is far better than Colonial Williamsburg or Plymouth Plantation because it is not set in a specific time or place; at the Village, visitors can see “all of American history.”

Jacob explains that he is here with his daughter and granddaughter to see the nineteenth-century baseball game. They are white and from Detroit and also have a membership. Jacob remembers bringing his family to the Village for the first time in the 1970s and now it too has become part of their “family tradition.” Jacob explains that the “kids determine” which parts of the Village the family goes to, but they love the train. When asked if they would recommend the site to others and why, Jacob says, “Of course, there’s nothing else like it.” “These are original memorabilia,” he says; “other than the Smithsonian, there’s nothing else that has this much history.” The family planned to return the same week with their neighbor, a recent immigrant from Israel, because he didn’t “know a lot about American history.”



Figure 5.5: Children participate in the Emancipation Celebration performance at the Susquehanna Plantation house. Presenters invite children to “Steal Away” and jump over the “river” to the North and to freedom. Photo by author, 2006.

Larry and Cindy, a middle-aged, white couple, were at the Village to view the nineteenth-century baseball game. Cindy described herself as a “museum freak” who teaches at an elementary school in the metro-area. But Larry is also fascinated by the past. His favorite film is *The Time Machine*. Larry and Cindy joked that they enjoy going to the General Store, because you can sit down on the crates. But they soon add that they really love Menlo Park. They explained that they like the Village in general because you “can see how the country was built,” and that it helps you “appreciate what you have” because life was so difficult for others. Still, there are good things about the past. Larry and Cindy say that in the past, people “used to be friendly” and “have a sense of community.” They say that they guess that, “some older ways are better.”

Phil, Jan, and their daughter Mary visited the Village during their family vacation; their hometown is in Minnesota. Jan said that she had visited the Village four or five times because she loves “history and hands on learning.” She said that people really had “to use their brain back then.” Phil was more impressed by how hard Americans worked in the past; seeing their daily lives represented made him appreciative of today’s comforts.

David Childres visits the Village often. He lives in Detroit and either brings his grandchildren or comes alone. Childres has witnessed the site’s transformation and like other patrons, misses the dirt roads. Still, the Village is one of his favorite places to visit and he comes to the site because he loves the “ambience of history.” Childres has been to Monticello and Colonial Williamsburg, but likes the Village best because it hasn’t been “commercialized completely.”

Conclusion

By 2006, Harold Skramstad's vision of a Greenfield Village that represented a more academic interpretation of the American past had blended with Stephen Hamp's dreams of a Disneyesque outdoor museum. Interviews with visitors and presenters confirmed that patrons arrive with different purposes, but almost everyone viewed history in a similar tension. The past was simultaneously better and worse than the present; although the past offered daily hardships it also provided people with a sense of community. Visitor comments rarely spoke to the way in which the site had changed their perspective or worldview, but they did demonstrate that visitor encounters are far from simplistic.

On one particularly hot August afternoon, a group of women encompassing three generations entered the J.R. Jones General Store: a daughter, mother, and grandmother. As they walked into the store, the guide explained that the J.R. Jones offered an example of the history of America's industrial and commercial development. She talked about mass production, the rise of catalog purchasing, and the important role that women played in shaping modern consumption. She mentioned that the catalog and fashion magazines made corsets popular and suggested why it was difficult for women not to follow trends. The middle-aged woman in the group then remembered a story from her childhood. Her mother had told her that when she moved from the city to the country, she hung her bloomers, decorated with flowers, out to dry and that this caused a scandal in the community.

In this brief exchange between visitor and guide, a connection was made between personal histories, national history, and local cultural history. This encounter moved both guide and patron into the interstices of personal and impersonal history. Such moments at the Village may be rare because of the emphasis on personal history and on making connections between visitors and the past. Yet when they happen, they are indicative of the opportunities for consciousness-raising at museums. At a private museum, even one stamped by the presence of someone as powerful and controversial as Henry Ford, visitors play a significant role in shaping the messages that it sends; most obviously because the museum relies on visitors for a large portion of its funding. In this way, it is as important to understand private museums as those funded by local, state, and federal agencies, because these sites elucidate, in the same way that popular culture does, the kinds of pasts for which Americans are willing to pay. In many ways, then, the Village's popularity indicates that for various publics, a past that recognizes American failures along with its successes is not marketable.

Yet visitors at the Village, both white and black, have also engaged with the traumatic and painful history of enslavement by engaging with the site's Hermitage Slave Quarters, the Mattox House, and with the now annual Emancipation Celebration. Efforts to popularize academic versions of America's past are not, then, doomed to failure. Scholars working in museums and heritage sites, should, however, seriously examine the effectiveness of using personalization to represent traumatic and painful histories. Empathy is powerful. If audiences feel connected to a specific past, then they are more likely to be affected by it. In representations of enslavement, names and personal stories are essential in communicating the inhumanity of treating people "just like you and me"

as property. But the results of using personal connection as a route to historical education are unpredictable. At the Village, the interpretation of enslavement in the most popular slave cabin focuses on the material aspects of everyday life. As surveys showed, a visitor's response to this depiction likely differs depending on his or her class or family's economic history. But for many, particularly white patrons who have experienced poverty either directly or indirectly, the story sends the disturbing message that "slavery wasn't so bad." The more pressing moral, ethical, and constitutional issue of owning human beings is lost in the focus on showing the similarities and differences of the everyday domestic experiences of the enslaved and the free. And at the Mattox house, the racism and injustices of the Jim Crow era are easily forgotten as patrons link their material pasts to those represented in the dog-trot house.

The way that visitors use the past at the Village is inherently embedded in this history of the city's urban and suburban development. As Orville Hubbard's and Guido's political policies gained local and in some cases national attention, Dearborn was marked as a racist community. The city's reputation has long, then, influenced how the African American population engages with the Village. In the Detroit metro-area, public spaces are in fact the opposite, often openly off-limits to non-residents, or subtly defined as private spaces. While the site may serve as a community center for many patrons, those patrons are most often white and middle-class.

There are two ways, then, in which attendance of African Americans to the Village will increase, if this is indeed a desired goal. It could be that as time passes, the local historical memories of Hubbard, Guido, and their political policies dissipate. Subsequently, African Americans in neighboring suburbs and from downtown will be

more eager to visit the Village. Another option, however, is for administrators and staff engaged in community outreach efforts to ask African American groups whether the site's location impedes their interest and if so, how they can address those concerns.

Although administrators now call the Museum and Village a history attraction, patrons do not seem to make this distinction; as evidenced by interviews, visitors are motivated by a wide range of goals, but all assume that they are interacting with "history." In fact, the changes wrought upon the Village landscape by Hamp's administration and the responses to these alterations by visitors speak more to the ways in which patrons' encounters have remained consistent since the late 1920s. Although many longtime patrons miss the dirt roads, in general, they continue to enjoy their encounters, which are shaped by various contexts. As patrons interact with homes, industrial shops, and material cultures of the past, their responses are contoured by their personal and family biographies, by their previous experiences with the Village (if they have had any), by their historical memories of the Detroit metro-area, and by the public images of Ford, Edison, and the other celebrities whose homes and buildings dot the Village landscape. There are, obviously, numerous other contexts through which to understand the visitor experience, but in identifying at least some of these categories, scholars find their way to a clearer picture of the dialogues that do and *can* occur between museum-goers and museum-makers.

CONCLUSIONS

Dream Cruising Through Greenfield Village and Detroit

In 1995 city planners in Huntington Woods, Ferndale, Pleasant Ridge, Royal Oak, Berkeley, and Birmingham—cities on the outskirts of Detroit—organized the first “Remember Woodward Dream Cruise.”⁶⁴⁷ The cruise called on owners of historic automobiles to drive up and down Woodward Avenue. But the 16 mile route did not begin in downtown Detroit. Rather, it covered nine communities on the outskirts of the area: Berkley, Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Township, Ferndale, Huntington Woods, Pleasant Ridge, Pontiac and Royal Oak.⁶⁴⁸ During the 1960s, the street was a premier site for teenagers fueled, as Robert Musial said, “by cheap gas, fast food and teenage testosterone.” The event now has its own website, which boasts over 1 million participants driving over 40,000 muscle cars, street rods, custom, collector and special interest vehicles.⁶⁴⁹ In tandem with the cruisers are special events held in the participating cities such as concerts and street-fairs. But locals often avoid organized activities, choosing instead to set out lawn chairs along Woodward Avenue and watch the display of classic cars.⁶⁵⁰

It is unsurprising that the Dream Cruise begins and ends in the city’s surrounding suburban enclaves. By the late-sixties, white-flight already marked the metro-area landscape. White teenagers likely avoided the downtown section of Woodward Avenue. What is most dreamlike about the cruise is its celebration of the automobile, an industry

⁶⁴⁷ Robert Musial, “Cruising the Strip Woodward to Relive Glory Days,” *The Detroit Free Press*, July 7, 1995, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

⁶⁴⁸ “About the Cruise,” *The Woodward Dream Cruise*, 2005, <http://www.woodwarddreamcruise.com/About.html>, 9 January 2008.

⁶⁴⁹ Musial.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

that is clearly failing in the state of Michigan. But residents continue to cling to the hope that auto-production will save the economy.

Michigan residents' faith in the auto industry was exhibited in 2008 when Mitt Romney, who failed to win a majority of the popular vote in New Hampshire, Iowa, or South Carolina, defeated John McCain in the Michigan primary. While McCain argued that the state's struggling auto-industry cannot be saved, Romney contended that the industry could be revitalized.⁶⁵¹ Romney's margin of victory was narrow—he received 39% of the vote in contrast to McCain's 30%—but his win is indicative of the way in which the dream of the auto-industry continues to haunt many Michigan residents.⁶⁵²

At the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village the addition of a new attraction celebrating the automobile also met with positive results. In May of 2004 the Rouge Factory Tour opened; two-thirds of the tickets had been sold through June. The two-hour factory tour takes visitors on a fifteen-minute bus trip from the museum to the Rouge complex. Patrons begin by viewing a gallery replete with Ford's classic cars. They then watch two films, one of which is a short documentary film about the Rouge that mentions briefly the "Battle of the Overpass." The second film is described as "multisensory" and is titled "Art of Manufacturing." Projected on a seven-panel screen in a virtual reality theater, visitors witness how the Rouge became a central manufacturing site during World War II. After viewing the films, patrons are given a panoramic view of the Rouge from the observation deck above the Dearborn Truck Plant, which is followed by a walk along the mezzanine above the plant floor. Michelle Fusco, a spokeswoman for

⁶⁵¹ John M. Broder, "Michigan Keeps Romney Afloat; Ex-Governor's Son Logs a Crucial Primary Victory Over McCain," *The New York Times Media Group*, January 17, 2008, <http://www.lexisnexisacademic.com>.

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*

the Detroit Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau, said that, “factory tours have been the most frequent request from visitors from outside the metro-area.” Mark Pischea, executive director of MotorCities-Automobile National Heritage Area told reporters that, “We need to make sure we understand that this is our legacy... This is the history of our grandparents that our children and their children will be studying.” But the Rouge Factory Tour does not leave the automobile and mass production in the past. As patrons walk along the mezzanine, they imagine a “Greener Rouge.” Tour guides explain the ways in which the Rouge is being restored as an environmentally friendly building, combining the best of both auto-industry technology and green production methods.⁶⁵³

The success of the dream cruise, Romney’s win, and the Rouge Factory Tour illustrate a phenomenon that has long been observed: Americans often fail to make the same kind of connections between past and present that scholars do. The Village landscape is not an overt celebration of the automobile in the same way that the Rouge Factory Tour is. But its landscape does celebrate people and depict pasts that could be decried given the current political, social, and economic climate. The history both inside and *outside* the Village explicates its popularity. This project has argued that the reasons for Americans’ failure or refusal to connect past and present in ways obvious to academics is best understood through examination of a series of contexts.

Understanding the Village through the lens of Henry Ford was clearly critical for this project. Ford’s anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and views on labor, are implicit on the Village landscape. However, equally important in affecting the visitor experience were the public images of Ford and his mentor, Thomas Edison. As folk heroes, both

⁶⁵³ Frank Provenzano, “Rouge Tour Opens to Sellout Crowd,” *The Detroit Free Press*, May 3, 2004, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

embodied populist cultural values that are echoed in the industrialists, authors, and scientists present on the Village landscape. Despite the Ford Motor Company's role in the Great Depression, the celebration of self reliance likely appealed to Americans who found themselves dependent on corporations and the federal government for economic security. Ford's complicated reputation among the African American community, and the Village's inclusion of slave cabins, a black tenant farmer's home, and the George Washington Carver Memorial, assured that black visitors, too, could be inspired or angered by Ford's depiction of the past.

An analysis of Dearborn and the Detroit metro-area also illuminate the politics outside the Village that shaped encounters with its landscape beyond the messages that Ford, administrators, and staff intended to send. The Village's largely white visitorship is explained in part by Dearborn's racist reputation among the black community. The site's landscape also lent itself well to the dreams that so many white middle and upper middle-class residents had for their economic, social, and political futures. With depictions of blacks during enslavement and Jim Crow, the landscape could be interpreted as one that supported traditional racial hierarchies that placed whites at the top. The small town landscape also provided the perfect alternative to Detroit's public spaces. With its Village Green, chapel, general store, and restaurants, white patrons could enjoy a "downtown" experience without venturing outside of their suburban enclaves. After the 1967 riot, Ford and other automotive companies faced severe economic challenges. Yet attendance at the Village remained high. The Village landscape complemented the politics of populist conservatism that led many longtime members of the Democratic Party to shift their allegiance during the late 1970s. Visitor surveys showed that Village patrons were part of

the national demographic who increasingly voted Republican. The Village offered visitors an escape from racial conflict, changing gender roles, and a struggling economy.

The Village's changing interpretation of the past also explicates the extent to which scholarship has found a place in popular representations of the past, and why the addition of academic approaches to popular historical landscapes have found limited success. When Harold K. Skramstad was appointed president of the Museum and Village, academic scholarship began to heavily shape the site's interpretation. Beginning in the 1960s, scholars began to enter the public history profession. By the 1980s, even private museums invited academicians to join their staff. Skramstad's successful addition of a working farm and an African American Family Life and Culture Program, however, was met with mixed responses from visitors who had, by then, developed individual histories with the site. Further, populism, which can express both conservative and liberal values, is so deeply embedded in the Village landscape that efforts to personalize the past often backfire. White visitors in particular can leave the site's representations of enslavement with a sense of camaraderie rather than injustice. And for black patrons, a landscape that embodies populist values may not necessarily offer a positive vision of the future, in which centralized institutions and organizations that protect constitutional rights are largely absent. Despite increased attendance from the metro-area's black population, many African Americans are uninterested in encountering painful histories. Like white Americans, they seek out experiences that are more celebratory and positive.

As in all scholarly inquiry, this project also raises questions. Is Greenfield Village an anomaly, or are the messages that other historic sites contoured not only by their administrative and interpretive practices, but also their locations? Obviously, Colonial

Williamsburg and Old Sturbridge Village operate in different ways and communicate varying messages about the past based on their size, administrations, and the time period and historical facts they depict. But scholars might also ask whether audience reception and interpretive practices are also textured by their geographic locations in Virginia and Massachusetts, respectively. Future research questions might further probe how messages about the past are produced by interactions between the academy, public historians, audiences, and the historical memories that have shaped the rural or urban region in which an historic site, museum, or monument is located.

During construction of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Commission members struggled to balance two opposing goals. It was essential that patrons see the Holocaust as a unique and incomprehensible event, while simultaneously connecting to the victims at an individual level. This challenge is one that all public historians face. Public historians can proceed with an eye towards balancing empathy with information in their interpretations of the past, emphasizing not only that we are all human, but also that our experiences are very different based on our race, class, and gender. Some of the most important connections between past and present are made when patrons recognize both their similarities with people of the past and their differences. This project also argues for a greater focus on understanding the audiences at museums. Village visitors arrive at the site with memories that either comport with or impede the histories communicated by presenters. As mentioned in the Introduction, scholars have approached their studies of representations of the past by focusing either on the messages that are produced, or reception. In this dissertation, both views were explored by placing

the Village in the history of public history, the historic preservation movement, and the Detroit metro-area.

What drew me to this project was the popularity of the Village, which celebrates Ford, despite the company's—and other automotive companies'—failures. But what initially appeared as visitors' denial about the present can also be understood as a fierce optimism and faith not only in the auto-industry, but in the realization of a certain kind of mythical democratic capitalism rooted in populist values. It is not grand houses and wealth that the Village celebrates, but an independent middle-class. While tourists flock to the Rouge Factory tour today, for much of the Village's history, its links to mass production were limited; the buildings depicting the lives of Ford, Edison, and McGuffey focused on their impoverished and middle-class beginnings. The Village may be, as Michael Wallace argues, a corporate version of the American past, but it is also one that proposes the agency of the white individual. The white farmers, inventors, teachers, and manufacturers celebrated at the Village are depicted as independent and audacious. The Village suggests a middle-ground between agrarianism and industrialism, one in which technology permits men to be creative, industrious, and economically self-sufficient. As the Village's history became tied to the local history of the metro-area, the area's racial politics were entangled with how the Village functioned as a public space. The America presented at the Village can also be, if one chooses, a racist one. Even as academicians worked to reinterpret the Village landscape, to debunk many of its proposed myths, the populist values embedded in its landscape were difficult if not impossible to erode. Many white visitors related to the experiences of enslaved and impoverished black Americans, but did not necessarily depart with information that elucidates the political injustices that

African Americans confronted. But during special events, such as Emancipation Celebration, when white and black visitors commingle and the door to talk about issues of race and class is opened, the possibilities for communicating a complex past at the Village is clear and the importance of understanding the dreams that appeal to various publics is illuminated. An analysis of these fantasies is imperative because the dreams about the past and the future often determine the culture of the present.

Appendix

HENRY FORD MUSEUM & GREENFIELD VILLAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE 1950-2006			
YEAR	VILLAGE	MUSEUM	TOTAL
1950	248,450	257,925	506,375
1951	261,788	265,069	526,857
1952	314,460	347,534	661,994
1953	375,675	437,940	813,615
1954	377,034	446,466	823,500
1955	369,277	435,201	804,478
1956	382,119	465,886	848,005
1957	408,873	465,079	873,952
1958	450,966	469,943	920,909
1959	470,609	497,782	968,391
1960	477,376	529,288	1,006,664
1961	508,256	530,913	1,039,169
1962	566,293	574,380	1,140,673
1963	608,536	585,654	1,194,190
1964	660,024	649,248	1,309,272
1965	717,658	683,684	1,401,342
1966	792,005	746,177	1,538,182
1967	684,821	636,402	1,321,223
1968	700,924	629,607	1,330,531
1969	671,972	640,112	1,312,084
1970	745,027	633,488	1,378,515
1971	860,445	687,144	1,547,589
1972	886,932	723,923	1,610,855
1973	973,827	727,732	1,701,559
1974	978,756	703,985	1,682,741
1975	949,132	702,332	1,651,464
1976	1,016,859	734,267	1,751,126
1977	923,515	667,037	1,590,552
1978	950,033	643,934	1,593,967
1979	929,674	641,179	1,570,853
1980	834,761	593,964	1,428,725
1981	680,429	479,862	1,160,291
1982	562,541	391,129	953,670

YEAR	VILLAGE	MUSEUM	TOTAL
1983	615,804	446,540	1,062,344
1984	652,070	458,261	1,110,331
1985	626,354	467,791	1,094,145
1986	652,283	515,562	1,167,845
1987	622,466	592,589	1,215,055
1988	623,452	676,913	1,300,365
1989	662,823	641,931	1,304,754
1990	613,493	602,257	1,215,750
1991	591,986	531,991	1,123,977
1992	544,616	509,438	1,054,054
1993	530,936	511,196	1,042,132
1994	589,284	495,965	1,085,249
1995	546,819	517,649	1,064,468
1996	576,478	512,072	1,088,550
1997	569,295	509,797	1,079,092
1998	578,812	495,534	1,074,346
1999	572,611	502,594	1,075,205
2000	596,984	535,484	1,132,468
2001	544,483	507,364	1,051,847
2002	441,261	455,527	896,788
2003	458,725	521,438	980,163
2004	488,017	453,098	941,115
2005	491,542	440,416	931,958
2006	494,810	461,344	956,154

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The Edison Institute Records include books, clippings of magazine and newspaper articles, advertisements, marketing plans, site reviews visitor surveys, interpretive scripts, maps, exhibition plans, board meeting minutes, administrative records, and interviews with former employees associated with Greenfield Village and the Henry Ford Museum.

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