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The Association For The Preservation Of Virginia Antiquities And The Weaponization Of Nostalgia In The Service Of White Identity

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Sunt Antiquissima Quaequae Optima: The Association for the Preservation of Virginia
Antiquities and the Weaponization of Nostalgia in the Service of White Identity

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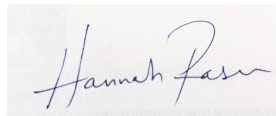
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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the practice of historic preservation, situating preservation and tourism as substantial arms of the Lost Cause movement in the late nineteenth-century. Through this case study of the Association of the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA), I illustrate how, in the aftermath of the Civil War, southern historic preservation efforts were primarily acts of self-preservation. The APVA exemplifies how identity can be created and maintained through the very performance of it – by the securing of a stage on which to do so. Heralding a specific brand of tradition, the APVA reached for the more distant grandeur of colonial and early America. Their conjuring of a pre-existing white, elite identity enabled them to forge a broader identity that unified whiteness across class boundaries. An elite women’s organization based in Williamsburg, Virginia, the APVA deployed their femininity and whiteness dexterously in the service of broader white supremacy. In the context of the post-Civil War South, I show the intentionality with which the APVA selectively preserved sites from which white elites traditionally wielded power and the ways in which nostalgia and memory have been embraced as historical reality. Through the examination of three sites preserved by the APVA in its first twenty-five years – the Mary Washington House, the Jamestown Settlement, and the Eastville Courthouse Compound – I describe how APVA’s preservation strategy yielded sanitized depictions of slavery and the glorification of white male figures. This thesis serves to problematize the authority with which heritage tourism sites are afforded by exposing the ideological and exclusionary praxes, which undergird the entire operation.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1890, before the newly established Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) had made significant strides toward its preservation goals, Cynthia Beverly Tucker Coleman made the rounds to women's groups throughout the state. The founder of the group, Coleman described the "unfortunate state" of historically significant relics throughout Virginia, beginning with Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg and the crumbling remains of Jamestown settlement. She stated her intention to resurrect these ruins and attempted to inspire a similar devotion in her audiences. Products of the antebellum era and witnesses to the devastation wrought by the Civil War, the founding members of the APVA endeavored to restore a sense of pride to their ravaged Old Dominion and restore the fading ways of the Old South. Coleman concluded her speech and succinctly captured the APVA's central ethos with the Latin phrase "sunt antiquissima quaequae optima," or "that which is oldest is best."¹

A specific group of actors often controls the historical narrative – "the victors" – as the saying goes. Paradoxically, though, in this case, the APVA, whose sympathies lay with the defeated Confederacy, eventually won out in quieter battles over cultural memory. Ultimately, their historic preservation efforts were acts of self-preservation. The mythic Lost Cause invoked a version of the South wherein white elites could continue to cling to a false sense of moral

¹ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, Speech, undated, Box 6, Folder 4, CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 4, "Writings: History of Williamsburg & the Desire of the Association for the Preservation of Va. Antiquities (APVA) to Preserve the Old Town, Cynthia BTW Coleman, circa 1890."

superiority and righteousness despite having lost the Civil War. Historic preservation in the late nineteenth century was an important vehicle for the Lost Cause movement, providing stages for the performance and perpetuation of the mythical Old South. This thesis argues that the APVA, as agents of both their whiteness and femininity, made significant contributions to the Virginian historical narrative by strategically preserving sites and structures that served to solidify and safeguard nostalgic havens of white supremacy in the wake of changing social, racial, and economic realities. Furthermore, I hold that APVA strategically focused on already-revered colonial and early American history, thereby removing themselves from the more controversial discussions of racial politics in the post-Reconstruction era. This decision allowed the APVA to pursue more covertly the same ideals of white supremacy as held by overt Confederate organizations. In its discussion of the preservation of the APVA's early sites, this thesis reveals the problematic nature and relationship to white supremacy at colonial era and early American historic sites.

Although renamed and relatively unknown over a century later, the APVA had a hand in the preservation of countless sites throughout Virginia and beyond. Heralding a specific brand of tradition, the APVA's reliance upon a performance of a pre-existing white, elite identity enabled them to forge a broader identity that unified whiteness across class boundaries through preservation and performance. Tradition, in this sense, signified a return to the status quo of "yesteryear," wherein white southern elites were virtually omnipotent. The aftermath of the Civil War and the decades to follow were characterized by the

emancipation of over 4 million enslaved people and ever-increasing urbanization. These trends fed into some white southerners' focus on "cultural rebirth," built on a nostalgic yearning for way of life perceived as increasingly threatened and potentially unsalvageable.

The APVA exemplifies how identity can be created and maintained through the very performance of it – by securing of a stage on which to do so. Visitation to a historic site requires a physical, embodied experience that often follows a ritualized script designed to incite an imaginative experience. The relationship among preservation, identity, and performance is one of recursivity and self-perpetuation. With many of their preserved sites still frequented by tourists, the APVA's work to reclaim a history and craft an identity in the context of post-Reconstruction racial politics would come shape much of the discourse on race and history in the United States today.

In this thesis, I use the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and the sites they selected to preserve as entry points to probe broader themes of historic preservation, tourism, and strategic performance. The APVA and associated sites also provide a means to interrogate a particular collective historical memory of the colonial and antebellum periods and the intentionality with which both have been constructed. Underlying the APVA's preservation agenda was the instinctual impulse, when faced with trauma, loss, and insecurity, to look to the past for affirmation, justification, and a sense of identity. This inclination is by no means restricted to the APVA but is instead representative of the larger milieu of historic preservation, a field in which many

problems persist. By harnessing early symbols of American patriotism, the APVA marshaled ideas about the past and refracted what they wished to see in themselves and in the country more broadly. The APVA's guiding preservation philosophies showcase the power of reimagination and the lasting implications of selective memory masquerading as history, both common practices seen throughout heritage tourism.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION, HERITAGE TOURISM, AND THEIR PROBLEMS

The accepted purpose of the study of history is to learn from the past in order to better inform the present and future. The presumption of history's educational value lies in its emphasis on the notion of posterity and its understanding as a moral necessity for progress. With an air of academy, objectivity, neutrality, and authority, history's narratives reap a certain degree of trust. As if it were possible to have a single, definitive telling, history assumes a scientific resonance, when in actuality it is an intentional selection of some narratives and erasure of others to curate and inform a particular version of the present and future, effectively creating a fictionalized past. History writ large can be politically utilized to discourage change and demand continuity for the sake of tradition, however defined, through the preservation of ideologies and structures designed specifically to limit the rights of some while bolstering those of others.

Memory, conversely, is usually invoked "in the name of nation, ethnicity, race, or religion, or on behalf of a felt need for peoplehood or victimhood."² A departure from the ostensibly sterile province of history, memory thrives "on grievance, and its lifeblood is mythos and telos."³ Memory, inherently personal and political, relies on experience. Mythos, an element that both constitutes and results from the forging of a collective memory, embraces the symbolic, sentimental, and rhetorical. Curator at the National Museum of American History

² David Blight, "If You Don't Tell It Like It Was, It Can Never Be as It Ought to Be," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American History*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press: 2006), 25.

³ Ibid.

Fath Davis Ruffins defines mythos as “the pattern of meaning and valuation expressive of basic truths and enduring apprehensions of a people’s historical experience.”⁴ Collective memory necessitates intentional remembering and forgetting in the upkeep of a myth. In the case of the APVA, historic preservation efforts seem to be servants of memory rather than history. The web of preservation entangles perceptions of heritage, genealogy, and race with the mythologies of the American Founding era and the Lost Cause.

Historic preservation as a practice inadvertently introduces questions about what deserves to be deemed historically significant, remembered, and conserved, and by whom. The standards of significance are, of course, neither published nor universally agreed upon, but rather are forged through a quieter battle over cultural memory. Preservation goes beyond physical buildings and structures. Preservation also imbues ideologies, designated heroes, and past practices with significance. Historic sites inherit and benefit from history’s associations with authority and objectivity while more covertly representing the interests of memory.

Visitors travel to historic sites and museums primarily for the educational value and authentic windows to the past that purport to reside exclusively within their walls. Though the public can access history through other mediums, the physicality of objects and architecture seems to place visitors directly on the stage past generations occupied. With respect to colonial American sites

⁴ Fath Davis Ruffins, “Mythos, Memory, and History: African American Preservation Efforts, 1820-1990,” in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, ed. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press: 1992), 511.

especially, “cultural production, while often seen by the public as a power-neutral site,” revolves completely around the “embodiment and construction of meaning and power,” often along the crucial axis of race.⁵ Historic sites can be understood as forms of civic education and the control over the sites entails ownership over the history presented, commenting directly on whom is permitted to create and have a stake in public space.⁶ In their preservation and presentation, these sites actively endeavor to “construct and maintain public white (male dominated) racial identities that both articulate with and bolster a sense of (white) pride in a partial history of freedom, democracy, and hard work.”⁷ Although historic sites may be open and accessible to the general public, the histories they represent to visitors are often fundamentally exclusionary because narratives of who and what counts as important are exclusionary as well.

Many historic sites utilize costumed actors/interpreters who speak in the first person-present tense to communicate the lessons of history, overtly exemplifying theatrical tendencies. These dramatizations are almost always based on primary sources and research but portrayals such as these carry with them a guaranteed distortion. The symbolic purchase visitors afford to the “minutiae on display at historic sites, preserved or re-created for public display” result in their interpretation as “*real* history, despite the fact that many of these

⁵ Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books: 2002), 8.

⁶ Mary Tyler-McGraw, “Southern Comfort Levels,” in *Slavery and Public History*, 157.

⁷ Eichstedt and Small, 4.

details are often the most conjectural elements.”⁸ While awed by architectural marvels and the mystiques of relics and their owners, visitors are subtly inoculated by a sanitized glorification of a past society, positioned as a time immune from the chaos of present ills. Not necessarily intended with malice or on the premise of dishonesty, these historical dramatizations “invite visitors to allow the performed past to substitute for the actual events willingly.”⁹ As an embodied and physical experience, performance can be understood as the “cultural expression and mediation of fragmentation, non-linearity, and the unspoken/unspeakable histories that complicate the fixity of the past, present, and future.”¹⁰ In the framework of historic sites, performance intervenes between history and memory.

A more troubling performance is on the part of the visitor. An implicit contractual agreement exists at historic sites between the tourist and the institution, wherein the script is somewhat predictable. The tourist expects the institution to provide them with historical access and information in exchange for a monetary fee and their time. Visitors can come to expect a retelling of events rife with pleasantries and conveyed with a sense of reverence, which they trust and consider “real by virtue of the conventions of the museum and by audience agreement, not by ontological essence.”¹¹ The tourists have more control over the script than they may realize and bear at least some responsibility for the

⁸ Scott Magelssen, “Living History Museums and the Construction of the Real through Performance,” *Theatre Survey* 45:1 (May 2004), 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁰ Jason Stupp, “Slavery and the Theatre of History: Ritual Performance on the Auction Block,” *Theatre Journal* 63:1 (March 2011), 80.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

content. As a fundamentally commercial enterprise, heritage tourism sites are charged with being both entertaining and informative, with a “propensity toward the popular or dominant story, often at odds with a minority perspective.”¹²

Catering to white visitors’ comfort, the script is often racialized and can become ritualized.

Embodied experience and movement creates space— physical space for association and cognitive space for identification and imagination. The process of imagination and the insertion of one’s self into the site and its script creates further distance from historical truth and fetishizes a colonial-period lifestyle of the white elite. On many tours of plantation and historic homes, the “slaves”¹³ become “servants” or completely erased of agency and existence on account of the “mostly white visitors” who “have little or no interest in imagining themselves back into the skin of or the world of slaves.”¹⁴ The traditional choreography of a historic site or house museum invites the public to enter the front door and imagine life as the owners lived it. This experience of imagining and identifying is emphatically not one of “coming in the back door, of emptying chamber pots, of working in the kitchen making someone else’s meals, of looking at the Big House from the slave quarters, or of living every minute with the wrenching vulnerability

¹² Tyler-McGraw, “Southern Comfort Levels,” 165.

¹³ With regard to the language that is used to discuss slavery, I have decided to use words such as “enslaved” or in an effort to preserve humanity and personhood. Invocations of the word “slave” will appear in quotations. Similarly, when a person conventionally referred to as a “master” is discussed, I use the word “enslaver.”

¹⁴ Edward T. Linenthal, “Epilogue: Reflections,” in *Slavery and Public History*, 215.

of one's body or one's family."¹⁵ Many of these structures, now historic sites or museums, were designed with a particular set of codes and prescribed social choreography in mind, making the experiential difference both inherent and intentional. Jason Stupp, in discussion of the 1994 enslaved auction block reenactment at Colonial Williamsburg, writes, "witnesses are inserted into a narrative charged with racial sentiment that reflects and resurrects historically racialized identities."¹⁶ The same can be said about Virginia historic sites of the colonial and early founding periods more broadly. Although many avoid overt discussions of the practice of slavery and the racist systems that succeeded it, none escape their touch.

The preservation of these sites allows for the performance and survival of a time when subjugation along racial lines was sanctioned by law and the main driving force behind the built landscape of elites. This elite landscape consisted "of a network of spaces— rooms in the house, the house itself, the outbuildings, the church with its interior pews and surrounding walled churchyard, the courthouse and its walled yard," carefully designed and reliant upon the interaction of separate parts to appreciate it in its entirety.¹⁷ The preservation of structures in this elite landscape allows for the experience of these sites and a particular version of elite living without the full comprehension of mechanisms like slavery, which were ever-present in these landscapes and the basis for these

¹⁵ Ibid., 215.

¹⁶ Stupp, "Slavery and the Theatre of History," 62.

¹⁷ Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth Century Virginia," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, ed. Robert St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 363.

lifestyles and levels of wealth in the first place. In a survey of plantation house museums, Eichstedt and Small identified the overwhelming theme of Virginian sites as emphasizing the state as “the birthplace of democracy” and the centering of the “gentility, civility, and hospitality of plantation owners.”¹⁸

Preservation simultaneously mandates a certain level of violence. The preservation or restoration of a site privileges a specific year or time period, effectively erasing all traces of other inhabitants and events that have occurred there. Preservation also perpetuates or compounds earlier violence, an assault on memory whose costs are delineated along racial boundaries, commonly borne by the same people continually marginalized in life and in death. Plantation homes-turned-museums simultaneously preserve a landscape of slavery while erasing the memory and humanity of those in bondage through widening gaps of interpretation. As discussed by historian Tiya Miles, enslaved people, while ignored by the general tour, are commonly relied upon, if not exhibited by, ghost tour guides in ways that perpetually dehumanize and demean their experiences. With violence and death being essential elements of ghost stories, slavery provides an everlasting supply. The conjuring of their memory in these instances is another means to perpetually enslave. In their treatment of enslaved women in particular, ghost stories often invoke their sexual exploitation on the part of male plantation enslavers, reprise their violent ends, and play off profane stereotypes. At the Myrtles Plantation in Louisiana, the story of an enslaved girl named Chloe illustrates this phenomenon.

¹⁸ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 6.

Chloe, a girl as young as twelve or old as fourteen years old, had been selected by the plantation enslaver to be his concubine. After being caught eavesdropping on a conversation, the enslaver cut her ear off as punishment. In an attempt to return to his good graces, Chloe is said to have purposefully poisoned a cake she made for his daughters in order to nurse them back to health. Instead, his children and wife succumbed to the poison and the enslaver instructed other enslaved people to murder Chloe by hanging her and dumping her body in the Mississippi River.¹⁹ Chloe's sexual submission to a male enslaver twice her age is portrayed "not only as mundane but also as Chloe's preferred situation."²⁰ One of two enslaved women said to haunt the property, she is imagined as the embodiment of "two of this nation's most prominent negative stereotypes of African American women: the Jezebel and the Mammy."²¹ The most troubling fact of all, Chloe has neither physical nor oral corroboration of her existence. In the worst case – or, perhaps, the best – she was completely fabricated for the commercial gain ghost tours provide often-struggling historic sites. Nevertheless, Chloe's lore, in the context of a plantation ghost tour, "satisfies expectations about the shadow side of the plantation setting while at the same time undercutting any serious analysis of the power dynamics therein."²² Ghost tours allow for people to talk about difficult topics such as race and slavery, which are often avoided on conventional tours, but with much lower

¹⁹ Tiya Miles, *Tales from the Haunted South: Dark Tourism and Memories of Slavery from the Civil War Era*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 91.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

²² *Ibid.*, 104.

stakes. The thought and discussion of enslaved people in the context of a ghost story command a “sense of the fantastical and the knowledge that what is said can be taken as fancy rather than fact.”²³ Sequestering of the consideration of Black lives and history to ghost tours interjects a problematic invocation of the enslaved as inherently illusory and a means of entertainment.

Heritage tourism destinations most commonly reflect the significance of historical, political, or cultural contributions to the overall trajectory and legacy of a larger group united around a national, ethnic, or other identity. Significance of particular physical sites is conferred through a shared identity or means of identification. In the United States, “heritage tourism,” an exclusionary designation, carves out physical space for the conventional subject position, white and male. As reported in the *New Yorker*, just two percent of the over ninety-five thousand places listed on the National Register of Historic Places concentrate on the experiences of Black Americans.²⁴ The American landscape of historically preserved sites overwhelmingly suggests that the only significant contributions to American history have been made by white men and white men exclusively. Unfortunately, this is not an accident. The resistance to historical inclusivity in preservation and public historical interpretation becomes more legible through the investigation of the conditions under which and reasons motivating the preservation of these sites and those who undertook these efforts.

²³ Ibid, 7.

²⁴ Casey Cep, “The Fight to Preserve African-American History,” *The New Yorker*, January 27, 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/02/03/the-fight-to-preserve-african-american-history>.

As intensioned by Southern elite preservationists, these sites promulgate a certain conceptualization of “American” which prescribes whiteness as the default identity, reifying who gets to claim public space and is allowed to call themselves/be seen as American. The mere claiming of whiteness authorizes visitors to these sites, whether truly descended from or not, to assert and even create their own fictive genealogical connection to the American forefathers and their accomplishments, commonly viewed under the guise of patriotism. Throughout Virginia, structures, now preserved and visited as historic sites, were built by but not for Black bodies. In their preservation and presentation, this truth persists. The impossible quest for authenticity leads to the pursuit of a far more manageable task of preserving certain ideologies, themes, and traditions to then impart to visitors. Quite often, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sites metaphorically represent larger ideals of patriotism, democracy, and liberty. Historic sites easily accomplish estrangement from the difficult years of violence, abuse, and death perpetrated on those very grounds, many times by the figures they are preserved to deify, through historical revisionism.

Many historic sites champion the particular heyday of their site, emphasizing the differences between then and the present day, while inviting guests to step back in time. Harkening back to one time, sites also reflect the perspective held at another time, that of preservation itself and convey that to an audience experiencing the site within yet another time period and context. Historic sites thus negotiate multiple temporalities, simultaneously creating and collapsing temporal distance between then and now. An important mechanism of

this negotiation is nostalgia. Stewart maintains that nostalgia is always ideological, as its intended past has in fact “never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt life.”²⁵ Because nostalgia conjures a past that has never existed, this representation is “hostile to history” and wears “a distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which only has an ideological reality.”²⁶ The desire to experience that which is no longer and has never existed is the underlying driver of nostalgia and is therefore inextricable from nostalgia and the narrative that governs it.

Poet Susan Stewart’s metaphors of the miniature and the gigantic serve as pertinent means for conceptualizing the oft-perverse function nostalgia performs at historic sites. Stewart’s discussion of the miniature takes the form of a dollhouse, an emblem of both interiority and the bourgeois subject. “An interiority which the subject experiences as its sanctuary (fantasy) and prison (the boundaries or limits of otherness), the inaccessibility of what cannot be lived experience.”²⁷ The dollhouse’s emphasis on interiority and access is similar to that of the historic site’s focus. Historic house museums sit atop the boundary between the public-private dichotomy. At first impression, a house, whether a dollhouse or museum, may be interpreted as the symbol of domesticity, a separate private space and haven from the outside world with its walls providing a physical boundary between the nuclear and the expansive. This perceived

²⁵ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 23

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 65.

access is an important point of exploitation through historical interpretation as visitors/tourists are made to feel that by exploring the interior of the figure's home, whomever that may be, they are able to gain a uniquely intimate window into the interior of that person or of that time period. This desire to experience is a quest to locate "the sacred within the secular," a chase for an elusive authenticity that never truly existed in the first place.²⁸

The bourgeois motif of the dollhouse also touches upon the vast majority of depictions of life at historic sites. The dollhouse boasts "extravagant displays of upper-class ways of life that were meant to stop time and thus present the illusion of a perfectly complete and hermetic world."²⁹ In many ways, the historic site does the same. The historic site works to reduce an entire time period into a digestible representation to be gleaned in an hour or less, effectively simplifying and sanitizing history into a palatable rendering of elite life. For reasons of material abundance or mere pleasantries, these representations are almost exclusively those of a comfortable wealth, erasing labor and the systems of cause and effect needed to ultimately arrive at this destination and sacrificing being in context to understanding.³⁰ As with the dollhouse, the contemporary "worlds of inversion, of contamination and crudeness" that exist outside the historic site are shut out by "an absolute manipulation and control of the boundaries of time and space."³¹ Regardless of the seemingly limited physicality

²⁸ Ibid., 61.

²⁹ Ibid., 62.

³⁰ Ibid., 60.

³¹ Ibid., 65.

of the miniature, a pure and uncomplicated version of experience pervades its walls producing a gigantic cognitive impact.

The inverse of the miniature, Stewart's gigantic is a metaphor for exteriority and the abstract authority of larger collective institutions in which the human bodies become miniature. By placing the body within the context of a larger macrocosm, the gigantic highlights the "body's 'toylike' and 'insignificant' aspects."³² The gigantic can be read as the broader field of public history and the context in which tourists find themselves when stepping "back" in time to a place they have never been. Nostalgia, as the driving force behind both the miniature and gigantic, is "a sadness, without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience."³³ This experience is then manufactured with the body playing an essential role in both metaphors. The crux of understanding derives from the triangulation of the body between the realms of the miniature and the gigantic.

The embodied experience at the historic site introduces the elements of performance and imagination, both of which have concerning implications for what can be considered historical truth. Architectural historian Dell Upton calls upon the "social experience" of architecture, in which "an individual's perception... changes with the experience of moving through it."³⁴ The social experience of architecture at a historic site can translate as fodder for the historical imaginary. Another way to reconcile the objective and subjective

³² Ibid., 71.

³³ Ibid., 23.

³⁴ Upton, "White and Black Landscapes," 357.

experiences within the built environment is anthropologist Setha Low's concept of "embodied space." In understanding the linkages among body, space, and culture, embodied space highlights the "body as a physical and biological entity, as a lived experience, and as a center of agency, a location for speaking and acting on the world."³⁵ By centering the body itself and appreciating its ability to both receive and perform social, political, and cultural norms, the work of historic sites and tourists who visit become clarified.

In the context of the APVA and historic preservation efforts more broadly, desire's centrality within the schema of nostalgia underscores the deeply personal nature of the experience. These preservation efforts' ties to the personal and identity become clearer and enable the naming of the desire that drove the APVA. As Ruffins attests, "the life of any individual collector helps explain the origins and inherent integrity of a personal collection."³⁶ Therefore, a fuller grasp of the collection of historic sites the APVA selected for preservation requires the prerequisite understanding of the women founders and the context in which they lived.

³⁵ Setha Low, "Placemaking and Embodied Space," in *Making Place: Space and Embodiment in the City*, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 19.

³⁶ Ruffins, "Mythos, Memory, and History," 514.

THE APVA AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION AS WOMEN'S WORK

The Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, founded in 1889, was the first statewide preservation organization. Founded and run by elite women in Williamsburg, namely Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, Mary Jeffrey Galt, and Belle Bryan, the APVA worked to “restore and preserve the ancient historic buildings and tombs in the State of Virginia, and acquire by purchase or gift the sites of such buildings and tombs with a view to their perpetuation and preservation.”³⁷ By situating the APVA’s historic preservation efforts within the larger social and cultural context of the late nineteenth century, they can be better understood as reactions to the South’s defeat in the Civil War and the elite perception of the challenge to and loss of their white Southern culture while strictly adhering to the rules of nineteenth century so-called “womanhood.” The APVA used their preservation mission as an occasion to capitalize on as well as gin up nostalgic recollections among their class of white elites. These nostalgia-driven reimaginings of the past were a way to also construct and simultaneously strengthen their white, elite, and feminine identities.

For elite white women in the nineteenth century, the standards of “true womanhood” loomed large, policing the behavior of both individual members of the APVA and the organization as a whole. White southern women of means, as most members of the APVA were, found themselves beholden to the “fearful obligation, a solemn responsibility” of true womanhood, the charge to “uphold the

³⁷ “Charter,” Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities 1896 Yearbook, Mss. 82A7, Folder 1 in “A.P.V.A., Colonial Branch Papers,” College of William & Mary Special Collections Library.

pillars of the temple with her frail white hand.”³⁸ As historian Barbara Welter distilled from her survey of nineteenth century women’s magazines, piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity formed the core of a woman’s identity and all she aspired to be. The fulfillment of each virtue determined whether one could be considered worthy of the mere title of “woman.” Although it may appear that a women’s organization like the APVA presented members with more autonomy, the APVA carefully ensured not only that all activities stayed within the bounds of maintaining the status of true womanhood but more so directly in the pursuit of it.

In the realm of piety, preservation work was viewed as bringing APVA members closer to God, rather than distracting from religious and domestic responsibilities. As Coleman attested, “Love of Country is religion for it is God-given, like the devotion of the Parent for the child and the heart that is not moved by it is fit for ‘treasons, stratagems, and spoils.’”³⁹ The pious woman would be “another, better Eve, working in cooperation with the Redeemer, bringing the world back ‘from its revolt and sin,’” just as the women of the APVA worked to right the ship back toward traditionalism.⁴⁰ The association invoked what historian James Lindgren has called a “Gospel of Preservation,” using the symbols of the Old Dominion in order to educate contemporary Virginians. These motifs included “a well-established respect for the First Families of Virginia, the usual promotion of states’ rights, or recently invented customs such as middle-

³⁸ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, (Summer 1966), 152

³⁹ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Coleman Washington, CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 3, “Writings: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Cynthia BTW Coleman, March 1896, undated.”

⁴⁰ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 152.

class domesticity and factory-style work ethic.”⁴¹ It is no coincidence that the first preservation initiative Coleman undertook was the rehabilitation of Bruton Parish Church.

This civic religion infused patriotism with Christian ideals. Religious overtones abounded in the organization’s descriptions of their sites as shrines, visits as pilgrimages, and notable men as saints. Coleman repeatedly made reference to Jamestown as “the Mecca of Virginia” and the site where “a great nation was born and first prayers in the English tongue offered in these western wilds to Almighty God.”⁴² Akin to Christian theological doctrine, the APVA’s gospel of preservation held that “God had created the United States as his special force, and the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were his guiding documents.”⁴³ Although the main idols and places in their dogma were those of the colonial and revolutionary periods, Confederate figures also joined their ranks. Lamenting that “our States’ Rights doctrine was crushed out at Appomattox,” Coleman likened General Lee to Ichabod, whose memory evinces “a great sorrow and cut deep in my heart.”⁴⁴ Coleman’s invocation of Ichabod, a biblical figure whose name means “the glory has departed from Israel,” captures the sympathetic and heroic orientation with which Lee continued to be viewed long after the war. Lee remained “unconquered, only overwhelmed by numbers,”

⁴¹ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 7.

⁴² Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 3, “Writings: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Cynthia BTW Coleman, March 1896, undated.”

⁴³ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 37.

⁴⁴ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 3, “Writings: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Cynthia BTW Coleman, March 1896, undated.”

Coleman reassured, adding that he will “live forever as the Knightiest man, the truest Christian gentleman Virginia has ever known.”⁴⁵ Through the use of religious terms and symbolism, the APVA framed Virginian history as supplementary Christian doctrine equally worthy of worship.

The issue of purity was on par with piety for women, the lack of which was deemed “unnatural and unfeminine.”⁴⁶ Chiding the North as the aggressors, violators, and invaders, the elite descendants of Southern slaveholders situated themselves as the innocent victims of Northern antagonization. The APVA similarly purified their memories and corresponding histories of the sites they preserved, imbuing them with sentiments of innocence, dignity, and righteousness. The women vowed to restore Virginia to the pure, virgin land they dreamed it to be and in which they could resume their former delusions of nobility. Without purity, both she and Virginia could be socially considered, “in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower order,” of which the APVA precisely sought to cleanse from their home state.⁴⁷ Removing carnal aspects such as the brutality of slavery from the sites they preserved, the APVA created an Eden, a virgin land out of Virginia – a colony founded as a commercial enterprise, which necessitated and introduced chattel slavery to the United States. Instead, the APVA chose to remember and preserve an idyllic and harmonious Virginia, a façade of which it was easy for white elites to be proud.

⁴⁵ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, “Jamestown,” CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 2, “Writings, ‘Jamestown,’ Cynthia B.T.W. Coleman, undated.”

⁴⁶ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 154.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Through this endeavor, woman could accomplish her “dual feminine function – beauty and usefulness,” while achieving the same on behalf of Virginia.⁴⁸

The crusade for purity also assumed racial and class dimensions. Many elite whites interpreted any type of social change as a direct threat and “tantamount to an attack on women’s virtue.”⁴⁹ Coleman and other leaders within the APVA held strong racist beliefs about African Americans and immigrants’ ability to meet their criteria of what it meant to be truly American. In addition to the aftershocks of the Civil War on Southern culture, other societal forces of the late nineteenth century such as “Darwinism, industrial capitalism, and radicalism” further exposed elite vulnerabilities and “emboldened them to reassert their influence over new immigrants, working-class unionists, and nouveaux riches” through not only legislative and economic avenues but also in cultural arenas such as historic preservation.⁵⁰ In a letter to her husband, Coleman condemned “the way in which the miserable negroes behave now about everything we hold sacred, or attach any sentiment to.”⁵¹ Taking a more favorable tone in another writing, Coleman recalls her “Mammy Polly,” a woman enslaved by Coleman’s mother, in her “neat dress of calico or domestic, with collar and apron all of spotless purity would shame many of the uncollared, uncuffed, high dames of the

⁴⁸ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 157.

⁵⁰ Lindgren, “‘For the Sake of Our Future’: The Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities and the Regeneration of Traditionalism,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97, no. 1 (January 1989), 51.

⁵¹ Letter from Cynthia to George Coleman, CBTWC Papers, Box 57

present.”⁵² Coleman seems to assure the reader that “in this period the servants were not called, or considered slaves,” and that “Polly was one of the best of her race.”⁵³ Coleman’s writings illustrate the dichotomous opinions that coexisted at the time, which often contrasted domestic workers who interacted regularly with whites to the field workers, who provided the whites’ livelihood yet were considered rough and uncultured. However much she valued or even loved Polly and the many other enslaved people who served her throughout her life, Coleman still clung to racist assumptions and held no reservations about blaming African Americans for white elites’ quandaries. The APVA’s remembrances virtually erased the presence of African Americans or assumed an air of paternalism when it came to enslaved people, further exposing their view of those different from the white elite to be impure and unacceptable.

Another central element of “true womanhood,” submissiveness was interpreted as “the most feminine virtue expected of women” in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Although women formed the bulk of APVA membership, a crucial fixture of the organization was its public-facing, male-led delegation and advisory board. The women of the APVA struck a careful balance of both asserting a certain degree of authority and independence as an organization while deferring ultimately to men to appeal for governmental support and in instances of public controversy. Like the true womanhood ideal, women were

⁵² Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, “The Children’s Mammy,” CBTCW Papers, Box 6, Folder 9, “Writings: Memoir about ‘Mammy Polly,’ family slave until after the Civil War, Cynthia BTW Coleman, circa 1890.”

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 158.

expected to “work in silence, unseen” with the goal of “pure affection, without the thought of money or ambition.”⁵⁵ The women of the APVA certainly did work and wielded significant control through the organization, bearing the brunt of administrative work and decisions regarding the direction of the organization’s preservation efforts. In line with expectations of submissiveness, however, they yielded to the louder, more respected voices of their male counterparts, with whom they shared the same beliefs but more quietly. The particular men, often husbands of women members, who found themselves the public faces of the APVA, left more accessible and opinionated writings.

Author Thomas Nelson Page, newspaper publisher Joseph Bryan, and President of the College of William and Mary Lyon Gardiner Tyler all served in the APVA in an advisory capacity beginning with the organization’s inception in 1889. Page, noted idealizer of the Old South and architect of moonlight and magnolias imagery, played a prominent role in the public relations of the APVA, often giving speeches on the organization’s behalf. Speaking in an attempt to raise public awareness and gain support for the organization in its first year, Page “recounted the sweet flavor of the old civilization and reminded the audience of the utter necessity of reversing the neglect, documenting the past, and preserving the extant symbols of the old order.”⁵⁶ Page believed that newly emancipated Black men were a direct threat to white womanhood, while his novels depicted the South as the bastion of racial harmony. Page towed the same line of ideas regarding civility and Virginia’s maternal persona, citing

⁵⁵ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁶ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 52.

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and others as “the proper product of [Virginia’s] distinctive Civilization, and were not uncommon types of the Character she has given to her children.”⁵⁷ Illustrating the bygone grandeur of his hometown, Page describes a scene that could be broadened to represent the shared sense of loss among elites felt throughout Virginia. One home, “which once was the home of culture, elegance, and princely hospitality, is now in the possession of a tenant,”⁵⁸ another “divided up and occupied by two or three families of foreigners, whose women went barefooted, and whose children sprawled in rags and dirt about the once polished floors.”⁵⁹ In Page’s view, and the view of the APVA, nonwhites and non-elites bore the brunt of the blame for the Old Dominion’s decline.

Joseph Bryan, husband to Belle the first president of the APVA and cousin to Coleman, assumed an important role for the APVA and its garnering of public support. A newspaper publisher, Bryan often operated his paper as a promotional arm for the APVA and historic preservation more broadly. He, too, used “biblical verse to spur the cause of preservation,” urging his Richmond readership and beyond to do what they could to aid “in this holy work.”⁶⁰ All the while both Page and Bryan ardently opposed women’s suffrage and dismissed the issue as superfluous since women were always to be beholden to the opinions of their men.⁶¹ Tyler’s role was slightly more circumspect than Bryan’s.

⁵⁷ Thomas Nelson Page, *The Old Dominion: Her Making and Her Manners*, viii.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 358.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 359.

⁶⁰ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 53.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

Although never an official member of the advisory board, Tyler presided over the first official meeting of the APVA in 1889. As an educator, Tyler had a personal stake in the fight to give Virginia its due in the history books and his involvement is just one vestige of the close relationship between the College of William and Mary and the APVA. Submission to their male advisory board likely afforded the women of the APVA a level of plausible deniability and an assumed innocence since they were not the ones ordinarily seen or heard. As quoted in Welter's piece, "true feminine genius" was maintaining a certain degree of dependence, "a perpetual childhood," always bound to the men in their lives.⁶² In another sense, their nostalgic reminiscence and the image they sought to preserve of Virginia was an idealized version of the Virginia of their childhood.

The fourth of the womanly virtues, domesticity, was one of the most prized.⁶³ Domestically, women had their own responsibilities to fashion and uphold a hearth of pleasantries and comfort for their men and children. By expanding the domestic beyond the confines of the home, the APVA considered Virginia as their extended domicile. Home was presumed to be "a cheerful place, so that brothers, husbands and sons would not go elsewhere in search of a good time."⁶⁴ As dispensaries of comfort and cheer, women were both expected and accustomed to maintaining a rosy environment, if not actualize one that may not have physically existed. In this way, the women of the APVA acted to revive their ideal past in order to cultivate that same assuagement in the face of external

⁶² Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," 160.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

uncertainty and strife. Discerning Virginia to be an extension of the home allowed for the women to remain “by her own fireside – as daughter, sister, but most of all as wife and mother” while physically and acceptably exceeding the confines of the home.⁶⁵

The women of the APVA could not help but regard Virginia in the late nineteenth as helplessly ill, pleading for “woman as comforter” and for her to fulfill “her role as nurse.”⁶⁶ The obligation of care persisted despite some of her daughters having strayed. In speaking to a group of Marylander women in 1896, Coleman stressed their share of the responsibility of caring for Virginia. Explicitly referencing Virginia as matron and earliest provider to them, she expressed, “Wherever Virginians have settled they have proved good patriotic citizens of the States of their adoption, still they have never forgotten – nor can they forget – their heritage in Virginia but have ever turned with pride to the old mother whose scarred breast, dismembered territory, and falling ruins render her yet more the subject of their veneration, the object of their especial care.”⁶⁷ Virginia, as “Mother of the States” and mother to them, especially deserved the care of the APVA, who surely accepted the burden as their domestic responsibility.⁶⁸

The realm of historical studies resided squarely within women’s purview. Its study was encouraged for women as it abundantly displayed “the depravity of

⁶⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 163.

⁶⁷ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Coleman, “Speech to Maryland Club, 1896,” CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 3, “Writings: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Cynthia BTW Coleman, March 1896, undated.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

the human heart and the evil nature of sin.”⁶⁹ Historic preservation was both morally imperative and uplifting, two key features of domestic labor. Although the APVA focused on preserving and protecting the past, their mission was inherently future-oriented with a commitment to posterity. In a message to the members of the organization having managed then-twenty years of preservation, President Belle Bryan charged, “The future calls with a clarion note to greater effort.”⁷⁰ While preservation surely brought the women themselves a sense of security, they often stressed the importance of Virginia’s children understanding the “truth” about their “history” and “heritage.” The APVA aimed to ensure that all high points of Virginia’s “past we wish to preserve, her honors” were salvaged for the purpose of “transmit [ting] to succeeding generations.”⁷¹ Indicating that there was still much to safeguard, Coleman pointed to “deserted burying grounds, crumbling tombs, some of almost princely grandeur and all calculated to stir the blood of those who can trace their ancestry to those Colonial grandees.”⁷² By invoking genealogical connections, she attached feelings of entitlement to an ancient superiority and an obligation to preserve it.

The impulse to memorialize in the residuum of trauma and loss did not debut for Coleman with her establishment of the APVA but instead with its antecedent, the Catharine Memorial Society. Coleman’s formation of this

⁶⁹ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 166.

⁷⁰ Isobel Bryan, “Letter from the President,” APVA, Colonial Capital Branch Papers, Folder 1, “Yearbook for APVA 1909-1910,” Addition 82A7.

⁷¹ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, Speech, CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 3, “Writings: ”Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Cynthia BTW Coleman, March 1896, undated.”

⁷² Ibid.

precursory organization five years prior to the establishment of the APVA can be read as a direct extension of her motherly duties. Motherhood, after all, understood by Coleman and her peers, added “another dimension to her usefulness and her prestige.”⁷³ After her daughter, for whom the society was named, passed away at the age of thirteen, Coleman assembled her late Catharine’s playmates to both ensure those outside the family would remember her and furthermore, achieve in her name.⁷⁴ In line with standards of feminine virtue, the young girls were taught to sew and to prioritize charitable work. In 1886, Coleman and the Society undertook their first preservation initiative: to restore the dilapidated Bruton Parish Church of Williamsburg and its graveyard. Documents compiled by later members of the APVA reference the Catharine Memorial Society as the “foster-mother” from whom the APVA took its “inception, its inspiration, found its friends and support; on this foundation it built its ideals,” underscoring the feminine ethos common to both associations.⁷⁵ Just as Coleman brought the members of the Catharine Memorial Society together for the sake of Catharine’s memory, she would do the same for the Old Dominion and its fading vestiges of the Old South.

In addition to Welter’s four central tenets of “true womanhood,” the APVA imposed two more qualifications. Patriotism was another quota to be met in the achievement of womanly status. They claimed the only requirement for

⁷³ Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 171.

⁷⁴ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 63.

⁷⁵ 1997.08 Addition to Mss. 82 A7, A.P.V.A., Colonial Branch, Folder 2.

membership was a “true and devoted love for Virginia.”⁷⁶ More complex than they advertised, the APVA’s variety of patriotism was more so a Virginia or Southern pride that rooted itself in complete opposition to the North. A “unifying force for the ladies of 1888” was the coronation of Jamestown as the rightful birthplace of the United States over Plymouth Rock’s claims to the same designation.⁷⁷

Beyond their distaste for Northerners, the APVA employed patriotism as an “effective means to foster a respect for history, an appreciation of historic sites, and a reverence for law and the customary ordering of society.”⁷⁸ The APVA sculpted the contours of patriotism in order to preclude “restless farmers, striking workers, and new immigrants.”⁷⁹ Their sites and associated pride were reserved for a selective portion of Americans.

Undoubtedly, to be white and elite were prerequisites for the attainment of “true womanhood.” The APVA turned membership in their organization into a measure of status, manufacturing the idea that “to be a proper Virginian meant joining the APVA.”⁸⁰ Although the ladies reminisced about and praised a simple life, they maintained an elite status compared to the majority of Virginians at the time. Like the structures they preserved, the APVA overwhelmingly reflected the perspective of the elite and strongly emphasized a return to traditionalism, which

⁷⁶ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 3, “Writings: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Cynthia BTW Coleman, March 1896, undated.”

⁷⁷ Richard T. Couture, *To Preserve and Protect: A History of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities*, (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1984), 16.

⁷⁸ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 36.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 6.

served their need for affirmation. The APVA claimed a measure of acceptance and inclusivity, boasting a difference of particular importance from other societies in that “no ancestral service is required for entrance into her fold.”⁸¹ Despite this fact, in the organization’s epicenter of Williamsburg, members reflected only the top echelon of society. The wives of, or the faculty members of the College of William and Mary themselves, joined the association, but “the school secretary and sexton did not, showing the selectivity of the APVA chapter.”⁸² Rather than elitists, the APVA touted its members to be “true Jeffersonians in the best sense, always willing to open their ranks to an outsider if she or he was of value to the aims of the Association.”⁸³ The APVA appeared unconcerned with the demographics of the organization, choosing to focus on more important tasks like “saving Virginia.”

The late nineteenth century showed to be a hotbed for women’s organizations, especially those concerned with memorialization and preservation. Alongside the APVA, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) took up arms in the struggle over cultural memory. Historian Karen Cox stresses the role of gender in commemorating and safeguarding the ideals of the Old South in her study of the UDC. She argues that in addition to women assuming leadership roles in the preservation of tradition, the Daughters more importantly “raised the stakes of the Lost Cause by making it a movement about vindication, as well as

⁸¹ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 3, “Writings: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Cynthia BTW Coleman, March 1896, undated.”

⁸² Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 77.

⁸³ Couture, *To Preserve and Protect*, 28.

memorialization.”⁸⁴ Although the APVA of the 1890s and beyond openly denied any affiliation with or resemblance to Lost Cause organizations, the organizations share strong similarities. Pursuing the same tradition-centered goals and employing similar methods as the APVA, the UDC “erected monuments, monitored history for ‘truthfulness,’ and sought to educate coming generations of white southerners about an idyllic Old South and a just cause— states’ rights.”⁸⁵ The emphasis on the legacy of states’ rights allowed for Southern states to create their own laws concerning segregation, property, and voting after the Civil War. Similarly believing that any history written by Northerners was inherently biased toward the South, the UDC moved to write their own version of history, exploiting their two most powerful tools – sentimentality and nostalgia.

The nearly thirty-year lull between the end of the war and the seemingly sudden explosion of memorial associations in the 1890s reads somewhat curiously. However, the 1890s saw “the generation of Confederate veterans and women who had experienced the war as young adults [] now coming into its own.”⁸⁶ Identifying this tenuous responsibility as a “burden-inspiration,” historian Caroline Janney underscores the personal place from which these women drew this obligation and devotion. These women grew up “hearing tales of beautiful

⁸⁴ Karen Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Caroline Janney, *Burying the Dead but Not the Past: Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 139.

plantations, faithful slaves, and heroic Confederate soldiers.”⁸⁷ Rather than forgetting fairytales or, worse yet, acknowledging the mythology and distortion that teemed from those stories, elite Southern women became more resolute in creating that fantasy so that the impending generation too could bloom under the same mythic delusions of states’ rights and white supremacy.

The APVA and its members, some of whom were also members of Virginia’s UDC chapters, made special efforts to distance themselves from Confederate memorial organizations. Coleman asserted, “It will readily be seen that [the APVA] anti dates the establishment of all the kindred societies, was indeed the first born of that wave of patriotism in Virginia that sweeping over the country has left the soil enriched by awakened memories of the past, and a newly kindled desire to recall the great deeds of men who in war and peace were the founders of this great Republic.”⁸⁸ In doing so, the APVA distanced itself from Virginia’s secession and instead asserted place as the foundation of the reunified nation. Although none of the APVA’s sites derive outright significance from their role in the Civil War, the APVA nonetheless conjured the memories of the war to spur inspiration and enthusiasm for preservation. Coleman, in an effort to ignite Southern sympathies among a group of Marylanders, asked, “And dear friends, is there no memory of the Peninsula campaign to stir your blood when troops from Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Carolina, Texas, Maryland shared with Virginians the perils of the Battle of Williamsburg in these unhappy times of

⁸⁷ Ibid., 137.

⁸⁸ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 3, “Writings: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Cynthia BTW Coleman, March 1896, undated.”

the Civil War?”⁸⁹ Coleman even exerted extra effort to ensure that the word “North” she had previously scrawled in front of “Carolina” was crossed out before giving the speech.

The APVA continued to deny any affiliation with Lost Cause close to a century after the association’s founding. In 1984, a written history of the organization commissioned by the APVA refuted any connection outright, stating, “Of course, there were other organization to which the same Virginia ladies belonged, whose purpose was to long for the ‘Lost Cause’ and view the antebellum era with nostalgia, but that was not the purpose of the APVA.”⁹⁰ Dismissing these relations as “easy,” the APVA claimed that the main difference emanated from the character of the organization.⁹¹ In their view, the APVA had “come to mean love.”⁹² A direct renunciation of the view of the Confederacy as motivated by hatred, they emphasized that it was love that “guided Mary Jeffrey Galt to dig with her hands at the site of the Church at Jamestown” and “labored to grasp the significance of what it all meant.”⁹³ They maintained that if the ladies of 1890s, like Coleman, Galt, and Bryan, were guilty of anything, it was their indulgence in romanticism and sentimentality – the “opiates that soothed the harsh realities of a newly industrialized life.”⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Washington Coleman, CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 3, “Writings: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Cynthia BTW Coleman, March 1896, undated.”

⁹⁰ Couture, *To Preserve and Protect*, 39.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

The APVA mixed “buildings, blood, and culture in its mission,” weaving together “architectural, ancestral, and cultural threads,” in quest to restore tradition to Virginia.⁹⁵ In doing so, the women of the APVA expanded their public roles and broadened their autonomy, while remaining firmly in the bounds of the ideals of “true womanhood.” Moreover, the women tailored their organizational methods to fit societal expectations of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, and vice versa. The dexterity required to straddle the societal expectation for women proved to be one of their greatest assets in accomplishing their historic preservation efforts. The perspectives and opinions that went into cultivating the idealized memory behind the preservation were those of older, white women who held preconceived prejudices and strong incentives for the safeguarding of the Old Southern ethos. Through their efforts, the women also managed to reconstitute their own identities, reaffirming their whiteness, femininity, and elite status.

In searching for stability after the South’s defeat and in the midst of ever-changing social circumstances to the comparatively conservative past, the APVA functioned similarly to Confederate organizations like the UDC in that they utilized memory and nostalgia in the memorialization of the pre-Civil War South. Ultimately, what the APVA managed to accomplish added another dimension to the Lost Cause movement and progressed beyond strictly Confederate memorial organizations. The APVA reached further into the past to weaponize the more accepted and revered history of the colonial and early United States in the

⁹⁵ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 6.

service of their more covert ideals of white supremacy. By carving out physical space and working to preserve these sites, the APVA secured the stages on which these mythical and pernicious ideals could continually be recreated and performed by future generations. Keeping their operation more clandestine and innocent by refusing to overly celebrate the Confederacy as named provided the APVA with a more legitimate veneer, while the women acted in the same interests as their openly Confederate counterparts. Their repeated denials and deficient explanations of their motivations introduce a more sinister tone to the larger field of historic preservation.

APVA SITES

The Association's founding documents, correspondence, and annual yearbooks expose the fundamentally exclusionary praxis that motivated the preservation of specific landscapes dominated by white elites, which both maintained and relied upon a racialized hierarchy. Three examples of sites and structures preserved within the Association's first twenty five years, the Mary Washington House, the Jamestown settlement, and the Eastville Courthouse compound, are representative of the three main bases from which the elite exercised power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the home, the church, and public buildings. By virtue of their preservation, these same sites allow for the continuation of the hegemonic power consolidation efforts of the 1890s and the sanitization or outright erasure of racial realities. In many ways these sites continue historical disfiguration through to the present and serve as the stages upon which the white tourists who visit can safely revisit and act out historical fantasies.

Buildings themselves are textual documents, physically conveying hierarchy and difference. Architectural historian Dell Upton refers to the white elite landscape of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century as articulated and processional. The landscape is comprised of "a network of spaces— rooms in the house, the house itself, the outbuildings, the church with its interior pews and surrounding walled churchyard, the courthouse and its walled yard," each of which touted its own particular features but also coordinated with each other to

represent the community at large.⁹⁶ Each of these hubs of white elite authority is essential to the complete legibility of the power dynamics of the day and each mandated a strict social code for its transversal. Furthermore, I argue that the APVA intentionally pursued and selected these sites because they determined them to be their most robust symbols of white supremacy.

Black people and the exploitation of their labor were omnipresent at these sites during the time of their intended interpretation. In fact, enslaved people at these sites often outnumbered the white elites and sometimes whites of any social class. Although they are conventionally understood as white landscapes, these sites have just as much claim, if not more, to blackness. An important fact that is intentionally expunged is that enslaved people took “a more active role in defining and claiming their territorial domains than their owners suspected.”⁹⁷ In many respects, the types of buildings, their physical appearance and layouts of the landscape were “contingent on some degree on their involvement with chattel slavery and thus ultimately were affected by the slaves themselves.”⁹⁸ Despite historic sites’ singular focus on the ways in which white people ruled over their grounds, Black people regularly experienced their own version of the landscape and many times altered these sites in ways that are still observable.

Intended as white spaces, these sites communicated racist and exclusionary beliefs covertly and overtly both during the time of interpretation and as the historic sites they constitute today. Sociologist Elijah Anderson discusses

⁹⁶ Upton, “White and Landscapes,” 363.

⁹⁷ John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), xi.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, x.

the concept of the “white space,” which directly applies to the historic site. White “neighborhoods, restaurants, schools, universities, workplaces, churches and other associations, courthouses, and cemeteries,” are often situated in ways that make their navigation a requirement and directly alter the embodied experiences of African Americans and other people of color.⁹⁹ Awareness of the white demographics and atmosphere stipulates a form of self-policing– the adjustment of comfort levels and consideration of certain spaces to be “informally ‘off limits.’”¹⁰⁰ In these same spaces and historic sites, white people participate in historical interpretations without thought.

Black presence, then, is interpreted as threatening and discomfoting, a “racial symbol that for many whites can personify their own travail, their own insecurity, and their own sense of inequality.”¹⁰¹ Fundamentally, the identities of the tourists themselves often impact the script at historic sites. One example of this is seen through historians Eichstedt and Small’s survey of southern plantation museums. Small, a “Black man with an English accent,” experienced and received distinctly different information than Eichstedt, “a white woman from the northwestern United States.”¹⁰² They attest that white docents appeared “quite nervous upon finding a Black man on their tour” and intentionally employed the word “worker” to reference those that had been enslaved at the site when

⁹⁹ Elijah Anderson, “The White Space,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2015), 10.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰² Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 20.

speaking to Small and “slave” when speaking to Eichstedt at the same site.¹⁰³

Docents also more actively invited Eichstedt to imagine herself back in the historical landscape, eating specific foods and staying as a guest in particular rooms. This invitation to the imaginary was not extended to Small, as no tour he participated in employed “the inclusive language of ‘you.’”¹⁰⁴ Historic sites like these and the APVA’s rely on other barriers to regulate their visitors, which allows for the myths glorified as history to continue and be shared to a receptive audience.

The APVA did their best to establish boundaries and communicate their intentions for what they wanted their members and audience to observe and embody. Catering entirely to an elite white assemblage, the APVA selected their sites to reflect what they wished to see in themselves. In attempting to collapse temporal distance between then and now, the sites invite mostly white visitors to visit the elite power hubs of home, church, and courthouse and share in their enshrined past. The Mary Washington House, the Jamestown Church Ruins, and the Eastville Public Buildings exemplify the APVA’s larger motivations for preservation, their creation of symbols, and consecration of tourist havens dedicated to white supremacy.

MARY WASHINGTON HOUSE (preserved 1890)

The Mary Washington House Branch of the APVA, one of the first offshoots of the organization, was established in 1890 with Mrs. S. W. Carmichael at the helm. That same year, Carmichael informed the APVA that “an

¹⁰³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 20.

effort was being made, by parties in the North, to purchase and remove elsewhere,” the home Mary Washington lived in from 1772 until her death in 1789.¹⁰⁵ The home was intended to be disassembled and moved to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago for exhibition. The women of the APVA “roused to prevent this” northern usurpation of their property and came to deify Mary Washington, the mother of George Washington, as their equivalent of the Virgin Mary.¹⁰⁶ This conceptualization continued the religious tenor that the association regularly evoked. The APVA pointed to Mary Washington's "submission to family responsibilities as a shining example," the true epitome of republican motherhood.¹⁰⁷ The importance of a women's traditional role is evidenced by the fact that this is one of the first buildings the APVA purchased in 1891.

The preservation of this home directly supported the preeminent Virginian ideal of motherhood and feminine domesticity. As the mother of George Washington, Mary Washington assumed an aspirational image for what women could accomplish from the confines of the home. Sara Agnes Rice Pryor's *The Mother of Washington and Her Times* became the instructional text for the APVA's idolatry of Mary Washington and displays the attitudes from which the APVA drew their adoration.¹⁰⁸ Pryor shares a quotation from George stating that he owed everything to his mother. This then transfers American's debt to him for

¹⁰⁵ Mary Jeffery Galt, "The Mary Washington Branch," 1896 Yearbook, in A.P.V.A., Colonial Branch 1997.08 Addition to Mss. 82A7, Folder 1.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 29.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

“all that we are as a nation” to his mother and the “wisdom of her teachings.”¹⁰⁹

The highest honor they believed they could achieve was the rearing of men like George Washington. The privileging of the home similarly created distance between an imagined traditional domestic sphere and the degenerative and dangerous world they perceived to be developing around them. The home being the center of tradition and of raising the next generation of young Americans, the Mary Washington House consummately fulfilled its intended symbolic purpose.

Over a century after its preservation by the APVA, Eichstedt and Small visited the Mary Washington House during their study on the interpretation of slavery at plantation house museums and rated its treatment of slavery as one of “symbolic annihilation and erasure,” the worst on their scale.¹¹⁰ Symbolic annihilation refers to the structure and interpretation of a site that allows for the “institution of slavery and the presence and personhood of those enslaved and of legally free African Americans” as “either completely erased or extremely minimized.”¹¹¹ Docents at the Mary Washington House actively engage in historical performance, donning period dress exclusively. In geographer Stephen P. Hanna’s experience, the docents only mentioned Mary Washington’s ownership of enslaved people in the course of discussing her gripes of poverty to her son.¹¹² Diminishing her culpability, the interpreters at the site dismiss Mary Washington’s ownership as minimal, having “only” owned four slaves.

¹⁰⁹ Sara Agnes Rice Pryor, *The Mother of Washington and Her Times*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1903), 185.

¹¹⁰ Eichstedt and Small, *Representations of Slavery*, 274.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹¹² Hanna, “A Slavery Museum?,” 325.

The initial preservation of the house and its present-day interpretation both mimic a common practice of enslavers in urban settings of making slaves and their labor invisible. As Upton shares, if slave quarters were visible from the house, they were either intentionally “arranged on the site and treated on their exteriors with an eye to the visual effect from the main house” or effectively hidden from view.¹¹³ According to the 1934 Historic American Buildings report, another outbuilding had once existed on the property.¹¹⁴ The lot upon which the identified slave quarters were situated was not similarly preserved but rather sold off and developed. The detached kitchen and possible quarters were built over to construct another wing of the property. A large garden— a common feature of the elite landscape and an extension of entertainment space— a kitchen, and another outbuilding remain, effectively erasing the structural presence of enslaved people. The Mary Washington House joins other sites of slavery in their efforts to profit from hosting events like weddings at the site. In 2017, the Mary Washington House used grant money for renovations to entice rental prospects. The executive director at the site offered “spaces on the first floor could be used for brides preparing for a wedding in the house’s garden,” “small business meetings or other events such as graduations could be held there,” and lastly “it could eventually serve as temporary exhibit space for the museum.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Upton, “Black and White Landscapes,” 361.

¹¹⁴ “HABS VA, 89-FRED,2- Mary Washington House, 1200 Charles Street, Fredericksburg, VA,” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, sheet 3 of 12.

¹¹⁵ Cathy Jett, “Mary Washington House renovations shed new light on historic home,” *The Free-Lance Star*, Aug 5, 2017, <https://www.fredericksburg.com/lifestyles/mary-washington-house-renovations->

The city of Fredericksburg is home to a multitude of historic sites and monuments but is primarily known for its Civil War associations. In a study by geographers Stephen P. Hanna and E. Fariss Hodder, of 277 historic markers surveyed in Fredericksburg, 117 interpret the Civil War battle or remember the soldiers who fought and died and just 16 commemorate slavery or emancipation.¹¹⁶ Just two of those 16 were in place prior to 1990. Three blocks from the Mary Washington House, the Fredericksburg Slave Auction Block still stands as evidence of the city's ties to slavery. The interpretation of this two-foot-high stone differs despite the historical marker proclaiming its historical usage. Oral history traditions maintain that enslaved people were made to stand atop the stone during auctions while local white historians claim it was placed simply to help people climb onto horseback or into carriages.¹¹⁷ Hanna attests to witnessing white tourists using the stone as a photo opportunity, "usually accompanied by laughter and teasing."¹¹⁸ The Mary Washington House is not exceptional in its shortfalls when it comes to the preservation and interpretation of enslaved history. The overwhelmingly trivial treatment of slavery in historic sites' interpretation allows for the degradation of the experience of slavery and condones a flippancy among tourists when it comes to being confronted with a history that does not glorify whiteness.

[shed-new-light-on-historic-home/article_414fcfb1-6e66-55c2-a445-f9b191a3ecd4.html](https://www.shed-new-light-on-historic-home/article_414fcfb1-6e66-55c2-a445-f9b191a3ecd4.html)

¹¹⁶ Stephen P. Hanna and E. Fariss Hodder, "Reading the signs: using a qualitative Geographic Information System to examine the commemoration of slavery and emancipation on historical markers in Fredericksburg, Virginia." *Cultural Geographies* 22, no. 3, (July 2015), 517.

¹¹⁷ Hanna and Hodder, "Reading the signs," 520.

¹¹⁸ Hanna, "A Slavery Museum?," 322.

JAMESTOWN CHURCH AND SETTLEMENT (preserved 1893)

The Associate President of the APVA proclaimed in the 1910 Yearbook, “Jamestown Island must always be our most priceless possession, and must ever hold the first place in our affections.”¹¹⁹ The APVA felt the preservation of Jamestown to be paramount to its mission because of its symbolic purchase. In their eyes, Jamestown symbolized the founding of the English colonies, the establishment of Christian religion therein, the origin of representative government, and finally the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race. After acquiring about twenty acres of land at Jamestown in 1893, the APVA quickly moved to make it the holiest of its shrines, upholding its title of the nation’s birthplace in direct opposition to Plymouth Rock, which commemorated the landing of the Mayflower over a decade later in 1620. Promoting its ties to Christianity and projecting its intended divinity, the APVA focused on preserving the church ruins as the basis for Jamestown’s multi-faceted significance.

In the schema of the elite white landscape, the church served as an important stage for the exertion of power. The planter steered between “being the planter-among-his-family-and-slaves, for instance, to being the planter-among-his-peers doing business in the churchyard before Sunday service.”¹²⁰ Although the relatively modest wood frame buildings that populated Jamestown in the seventeenth century may not be emblematic of the type of structures the elite landscape usually conjures, the APVA placed much of its focus on the ruins of

¹¹⁹ Lora Hotchkiss Ellyson, “Report of the Associate President,” “Yeare Booke of the Association of the Preservation of Virginia for 1908-1910” in A.P.V.A., Colonial Branch 1997.08 Addition to Mss. 82A7, Folder 1.

¹²⁰ Upton, “White and Black Landscapes,” 364.

the seventeenth century church. The original church was located in the center of town and constructed in 1608. As a post in the ground structure with mud walls and a bay system layout, this church did not survive. 1901 excavations by the APVA uncovered the foundations of a brick church constructed in the 1630s or 40s. Hypothetical interpretations of the church's appearance show clear English influences, namely the signature "elongated rectangle whose length was at least twice its width" with a central aisle and chancel.¹²¹ This tie to England is something the APVA sought to exploit in their quest to solidify Anglo-Saxon greatness. In her personal historic recounting of Jamestown, Coleman dwelled upon an imagined conceptualization of its interior with "its cedar pews and walnut communion table— made sweet with flowers by Lord Delaware."¹²²

At the core of the APVA's symbolic emphasis was the Christian missionary and "civilizing" work of the Jamestown settlers. The London Company, "comprised of many good and wise men" prioritized the "conversion of the heathen and their oft-repeated mistractions."¹²³ The epitome of their civic religion, the APVA christened Jamestown as the "Mecca of Virginia"¹²⁴ and John Smith their principle saintly figure, "a bold and ambitious spirit tempered by the highest humanity and devout Christian ruling" and the "esteemed genius of

¹²¹ Carl Lounsbury, "Material Culture of Dissent: Meeting Houses, Chapels, and Churches in England and America, 1600-1830," in *Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, II*, ed. Andrew Thompson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 428.

¹²² Cynthia Beverly Tucker Coleman Washington, "Jamestown," CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 2, "Writings, "Jamestown," Cynthia B.T.W. Coleman, undated.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Coleman Washington, CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 3, "Writings: Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, Cynthia BTW Coleman, March 1896, undated."

American colonization.”¹²⁵ In both their speeches and internal memoranda, APVA credited Smith’s “energy, self-sacrifice, wisdom and endurance” with the permanence of Jamestown and the eventual “mighty English speaking nation.”¹²⁶ Through these symbols, the APVA directly tied the foundation of the Virginia colony, and thereby the eventual United States, to Christian adoration.

The Jamestown Church also bore witness to another revered occasion of colonial history, Bacon’s Rebellion. Prior to its preservation, Coleman chronicled her own understanding of the history at the site. Evoking romanticism, she laments, “The flames throwing out their long arms hugged to death that Church which Smith had labored to preserve... that Church made sacred to human love by the marriage acts between the Princess Pocahontas and John Rolfe— that Church made sacred... by the prayers of the saints and the holy men like Hunt and Buck.”¹²⁷ Although the church did not withstand the rebellion, its ashes personified an “effectual protest against a tyrannous and oppressive rule.”¹²⁸ Paralleling her framing of Virginia as devastated and in need of help, Coleman expressed dejectedly that “naught remains at this day of the Church at Jamestown but a ruined tower picturesque in its decay.”¹²⁹ The preservation and salvation of these holy grounds, then, was the APVA’s utmost priority.

Jamestown provides the clearest example of the APVA’s ritualization of their civil religion, treating the site writ large as a place for religious worship of

¹²⁵ Cynthia Beverly Tucker Coleman Washington, “Jamestown,” CBTWC Papers, Box 6, Folder 2, “Writings, “Jamestown,” Cynthia B.T.W. Coleman, undated.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

their own. In 1895, the APVA designated May 13th to be “Virginia Day.” Celebrations entailed an annual “pilgrimage” to Jamestown to recall “the memory of that far-off morning in 1607, when the sun broke over a land where the great work of political salvation was to commence, where an empire of justice, liberty and peace was to flourish, and where the wilderness and solitary place were to be converted into smiling fields of plenty.”¹³⁰ Cloaked in pageantry and romanticism, APVA advisors articulated their mythical recollections of Jamestown and enacted their own traditions such as ceremonially planted trees. Tradition-inclined Virginians soon regarded Virginia Day in a higher esteem than the Fourth of July.¹³¹ The APVA intended these pilgrimages, in addition to raising money for the organization, to be a transformative experience for the pilgrims who attended. The Vice President, Margaret V. Smith, shared with the rest of the association in the 1896 yearbook of the pilgrimage’s success in creating an “undying memory in the hearts of those who were so fortunate as to witness it.”¹³²

Jamestown’s import reached beyond white Christians, as it was the site to which the first African slaves were brought to the English colonies. The year 1619 instead was celebrated by the APVA as the beginning of representative democracy, touting ideas of freedom and autonomy. They willfully ignored the

¹³⁰ Margaret V. Smith, “Norfolk Branch,” 1896 Yearbook, Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 1997.08 Addition to Mss. 82A7, A.P.V.A., Colonial Branch, Folder 1.

¹³¹ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 108.

¹³² Margaret V. Smith, “Norfolk Branch,” 1896 Yearbook, Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, 1997.08 Addition to Mss. 82A7, A.P.V.A., Colonial Branch, Folder 1.

antithetical system of race-based enslavement the same so-called “democratic” architects catalyzed the same year. The APVA extended invitations to all for Virginia Day celebrations except African Americans. Abiding by Jim Crow segregation, they stipulated, “negro excursions or picnic parties are not admitted.”¹³³ In 1916, the APVA similarly rejected a school’s efforts to place a statue commemorating the first Africans in the United States.¹³⁴ The fact that the first Africans arrived in America by way of Jamestown was well known but intentionally ignored. Adding insult to injury, the APVA formulated the three hundredth anniversary of their arrival to instead celebrate “one of the most vital events in the history of our new world” when “the first legislative assembly of English-America sat in a little church in Jamestown and opened the way of justice for a country which their clear vision saw.”¹³⁵ The APVA effectively erased the first instance of slavery in the English colonies only to instead laud the same enslavers for their being the “first voice in a wilderness which has grown into a far-reaching cry for liberty and love.”¹³⁶

EASTVILLE COURTHOUSE COMPOUND (preserved 1913)

In 1913, the Northampton Branch of the APVA acquired the 1731 courthouse, clerk’s office, and debtor’s prison in the town of Eastville on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. The APVA took swift action to purchase and relocate

¹³³ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 109.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Lora Hotchkiss Ellyson, “Mrs. J. Taylor Ellyson’s Address,” 1919 APVA Yearbook in 1997.08 Addition to Mss. 82A7, A.P.V.A., Colonial Branch, Folder 1.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

the 1731 Courthouse on-site, which was slated for demolition in order to make way for a monument honoring the Confederacy.¹³⁷ The courthouse was the third of white elites' vital seats of influence. Those who served as magistrates considered the public buildings on courthouse grounds as "symbolic manifestations of their authority, conflating in that vision public weal with oligarchic identity."¹³⁸ The refinement of the legal system throughout the eighteenth century was reflected physically through the plans and composition of courthouses. The Eastville buildings exemplify the evolution of legal concepts and the burgeoning power of elites that they attempted to maintain in face of changing notions of government and adjudication.

Informational guides at the courthouse compound as of April 2019 spotlight the structures' ties to the American Revolution. They also affirm magistrates' disapproval of the Stamp Act and their request for a reading Declaration of Independence at the door of the courthouse.¹³⁹ Remaining true to the founding strategies of the APVA, the Northampton Branch of the twentieth century similarly conjured venerated events and characters from early Virginian history such as John Smith and John Marshall. The Eastville public buildings serve as examples of the transformation of public architecture. The many iterations of the county courthouse chronicle both changing building practices as well as the procedures of law. After a series of impermanent earthfast buildings,

¹³⁷ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 155.

¹³⁸ Carl Lounsbury, *Courthouses of Early Virginia*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 84.

¹³⁹ "The 1731 Courthouse of Northampton County, Northampton County Courthouse, Museum Exhibit, viewed April 23, 2019.

the 1731 brick courthouse boasted a “chevron-patterned gable end that echoed the trend in the use of decorative brickwork in a few rich planters’ houses.”¹⁴⁰ The more durable use of brick communicated the permanence of the law, increased formality of court proceedings, and materialized an imposing air. The preservation of the Eastville Courthouse compound also preserved the extended domain of white authority beyond the courthouse itself and into supporting structures such as the common green, debtor’s prison, and tavern. Elites traveled to the courthouse complex, “gathered in the yard or the recessed loggia, and then went into court, where some were arrayed on the bench as the planter-among-his-fellow-magistrates.”¹⁴¹ These formal and informal structures each served a necessary function in the business and governmental processes of white elites, blending “the most mundane of human affairs with those of the greatest moments.”¹⁴²

The Confederate Monument was installed directly in front of the current courthouse in 1913. Dedicated by the Harmanson-West Camp Confederate Veterans, The Daughters of the Confederacy and the other citizens of the Eastern Shore, the monument stands to honor the soldiers of the Confederacy from Northampton and Accomack counties who “died bravely in war, or in peace lived nobly to rehabilitate their country.”¹⁴³ Prominently situated in the foreground of both the historic site and the courthouse, the monument communicates local

¹⁴⁰ Lounsbury, *Courthouses of Early Virginia*, 95.

¹⁴¹ Upton, “White and Black Landscapes,” 364.

¹⁴² Lounsbury, *Courthouses of Early Virginia*, 90.

¹⁴³ The Harmanson-West Camp Confederate Veterans, The Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Citizens of the Eastern Shore of Virginia, *Confederate Monument*, (1913), Cape Charles, Virginia, viewed April 23, 2019.

sympathies for the cause of the Confederacy with explicit intimidatory implications. The Clerk's Office also houses the built-in measuring rod used in the process of selling slaves.¹⁴⁴ This measuring rod serves as a reminder that the foremost experience of Black people in this landscape was their being bought and sold as property. At the time of preservation in the early twentieth century, African Americans comprised the majority of the Eastville population and because this historic site is also home to a functioning governmental building, they likely were forced to confront these symbols and relics of trauma as a condition of their daily lives.

Writing during the second half of the twentieth century, Cecile Mears Turner, author of one of the informational placards at the site, takes a page straight from the APVA playbook of the late nineteenth century. She laments, "a 'shrinking' world and the greater mobility of population have brought about development of property, increase in numbers of permanent and part-time residents, more and faster-moving traffic and the diminished importance of the many small towns."¹⁴⁵ Like the founding ladies of the APVA, Turner finds comfort in the old records, which provide "a sense of stability and surety that place the current changes in proper perspective and give reassurance that the future will not completely dominate and overwhelm our past."¹⁴⁶ Her romanticizing of a "gentler way of life" privileges the white perspective while ignoring the traumatic realities of sites like these for African Americans.

¹⁴⁴ Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion*, 156.

¹⁴⁵ Turner, "Introduction," Northampton County Courthouse Museum Exhibit, viewed April 23, 2019.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

In the preface to Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, the highly influential work on decolonization, Homi K. Bhabha asks, "Who still waits in the antechamber of history?"¹⁴⁷ This question, one in a series of inquiries, was almost certainly meant as a rhetorical exercise, probing the seemingly endless project that is (de)colonization. To read more literally and for its architectural implications, this query instead comments on history's privileging capabilities. The antechamber in a formal house plan functions as a waiting and entertaining room in a series of chambers wherein the elite resident of the home would advance from their more private bed chambers to meet their guest in the public space of the antechamber. The further into these rooms one was permitted to enter indicated the status of the visitor and the level of trust with which the owner of the manor regarded them. Visitors were expected to perform both status and identity through a demonstrated understanding of social protocol. Another dynamic at play in the case of the elite American home, who were those who waited upon those in antechambers but the enslaved in many instances?

In reaction to perceived national and racial threats, the APVA and their preserved sites served to memorialize, solidify, and invent a "history" that supported a hierarchy wherein white Anglo-Saxons maintained superiority over newly freed Black people and their perceived depreciating power. In controlling the historical narrative, the APVA reinforced its own white, elite, and feminine identities through the creation of sanctuaries for the perpetuation of white

¹⁴⁷ Homi K. Bhabha "Foreword: Framing Fanon," in *The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), ix.

supremacy. The selection of these sites need not be taken for granted as these places, figures, and their pasts were intentionally preserved to reinforce a mythology derived from sanitized memories of a period wherein whites exercised near-absolute control. When positioned within the larger context, the sites, their motives, and performative work appear much darker. The persistence of Lost Cause mythology is evidenced through the continual defense of Confederate monuments as “Heritage Not Hate.” The pride which the APVA strove to inspire in their fellow white Virginians similarly made claims to heritage and therefore ownership of the history and the country they believed to have created.

All of this is not to say that the APVA did not pursue important work that served as a guide for future organizations or that the preservation of historic sites is not worthwhile or instructive from a public history standpoint. It is to show, however, that the uses of these structures as metaphorical representations of larger, harmful ideologies is to a large extent encoded into their interpretation and symbolism by design. The troubling motivations of preservation should be presented and problematized to today’s visitors who continue to be overwhelmingly of a white and middle-class demographic. The traditional focus on the temporal parameters of the life of the structure and not on the conditions of preservation serves to legitimize an ahistorical depiction, replicating the same historical bias in favor of white elites seen in the documentary archive and the sample of extant eighteenth century buildings. Providing tourists with the license to imagine themselves into fabricated history is dangerous and obscures the

darker motivations that served to restore and preserve an oppressive social structure.

As Hanna and Hodder caution, “It is important to understand that the processes of making and remaking meanings in commemorative landscapes are not merely textual,” but instead are “informed, reproduced, and challenged through bodily practices and performances.”¹⁴⁸ Therefore, the meanings and significance of historic sites are under conscious and continuous maintenance, providing the opportunity for a rewriting and an exhumation of the other stories intentionally erased. Although these sites have in their foundations the gears of the machinery of white supremacy, through the true historical process of remaking, they are not doomed to this path. The power of weaponized nostalgia and historical narratives is underestimated with respect to public historical sites and the continued interpretive practices shared among them. Interrogating these ritualized scripts and illuminating the prejudicial conditions of preservation should be employed to subvert tired habits.

¹⁴⁸ Hanna and Hodder, “Reading the signs,” 512.

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