

Contesting Identity and Citizenship in National Parks, 1900-1935

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## ABSTRACT

“In the Bosom of the Storied Blue Ridge Mountains:” Contesting the Future of American Culture in Shenandoah National Park, 1924-1936

In the early 20th century, as the National Park Service gained traction, legislators in the east pushed to preserve large tracts of land in the “western” mind. Yet the forces that converged in the early twentieth century to produce the National Park movement and to envision what those parks should be were more complicated than Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson’s presidencies imply. Theoretically parks for “the people,” National Park locations, resources, and regulations were often governed by the social and economic elite. In the case of eastern parks like Shenandoah, the government acquired land through land condemnation acts, often at the expense of rural and lower income communities. Efforts at Shenandoah, while drastic, illustrate how the creation of National Parks sought not only to preserve land, but also to craft and constitute a particular vision of American culture. Justified as places where the American public could go to enjoy health and continued prosperity, these places simultaneously offered lessons in what it should and should not mean to be an American. In their rejection of mountain culture in Shenandoah, the federal government defined America’s past, present, and future as a place of supposed national growth, consumer culture, and economic advancement.

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The Yorktown Problem”: Constructing a Cultural Landscape, 1900-1935

The history of the Uniontown community and Yorktown National Battlefield demonstrates that sites of memory are always contested, and that meaning is not only inscribed through formal means, such as interpretive signs or government-sponsored events, but is also appropriated and generated through cultural uses of sites of memory. Moreover, the founding of Yorktown National Battlefield reveals that the reconciliationist narrative of erasure applied to Civil War memory does not always hold. Park administrators made decisions for pragmatic, though not unproblematic, reasons, guided by their understanding of what makes history and what is significant in history. Taken collectively, the story of Yorktown and Uniontown demonstrates that the history and goals of national spaces must continually be interrogated and revised to ask what has been expunged, and what needs to be uncovered again to generate a more inclusive understanding of the past.

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To my parents, who have always encouraged.

Though I did not intend to write two papers about displacement in National Parks, my two research projects are related in that they both examine the period of creation in National Parks, and the subsequent relocation of local populations residing within park boundaries. Both are representative of my interests in public history, and in the creation of national sites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

My first research paper, “‘In the Bosom of the Storied Blue Ridge Mountains’: Contesting the Future of American Culture in Shenandoah National Park, 1924-1936,” stemmed from a lingering question I had concerning an exhibit on display in the park that discussed displacement of mountain residents. The exhibit explained that park proponents disseminated caricatured images of mountain peoples in order to justify their relocation. I found that while researchers, particularly archeologists, have debunked the myth of the backwards mountaineer found in those images, the question remained why that platform gained traction in the general public and also what it could tell us about the United States politicians hoped to build through National Parks. Having worked for the National Park Service, I knew that the motivations of park founders were rarely as benign as we might wish, and that many were also motivated by the idea that parks could create a more productive and virtuous citizenry. Consequently, I sought out primary sources related to Shenandoah’s founding, particularly newspaper articles and dedication speeches, as well as numerous “studies” published by sociologists about the mountain residents during this era, in order to see what those depictions could tell us about popular culture at that time and the version of the United States park supporters envisioned when

they constructed National Parks in the name of “preservation.”

While I am not sure that I intend to try to publish this paper, it was a useful research exercise and utilized sources like scientific studies that I had not used before. Moreover, I think that because Shenandoah was such a large and prominent park, it provided a working framework for how I understand the National Park movement during the 1930s when many were coming into existence. I also had the opportunity to present this paper at the Graduate Research Symposium which was particularly useful practice for conferences, and a reminder that academic conference presentations are not the same as interpretive public programs.

Incidentally, my second paper, “‘The Yorktown Problem’: Constructing a Cultural Landscape, 1900-1935,” also arose from an encounter with a National Park, this time at Yorktown National Battlefield this past fall. Though it is interpreted as a Revolutionary War site, it is also home to a National Cemetery because Yorktown witnessed a battle in the Civil War and remained a Union fort for the war’s duration. Today the site bears little resemblance to its original appearance when the park was founded in the 1930s, as at that time a former freedmen’s community still existed throughout much of what is today a wooded area. Having already been interested in National Cemeteries as memorial spaces, but further as sites of national discourse, I was particularly struck by a cemetery that today exists just outside Yorktown’s walls. This cemetery belonged to the freedmen’s community. In many ways this project brought together some of my biggest interests in National Cemeteries as well as the legacy of emancipation in Civil War memory.

Unfortunately, this project was not as straightforward as I had expected. I

expected the park to have plenty of records related to its own cemetery and that those records would provide my primary source base. As it turned out, whatever records the park does have remain in storage. I spent considerable amount of time attempting to arrange to see the few records that were currently available, to no avail, as I was redirected from the curator to an intern and despite many emails never given the opportunity to actually schedule the research visit I had requested. However, by a small miracle, the National Archives' holdings of records of Yorktown National Cemetery happen to be stored in their Philadelphia branch, and I was able to access them over spring break. Moreover, Swem's special collections contains three boxes worth of material belonging to Floyd Flickinger, an early historian and then superintendent at Colonial National Historical Park, which includes Yorktown. At first these two sets of records seemed too unrelated to synthesize, particularly because Flickinger's papers rarely talk about the National Cemetery and even more infrequently mention the Uniontown freedmen's community – even though both were prominently located on the park's landscape from the outset. Over the course of this project though I realized that there was much that could be done to bring these two sources into conversation.

Dr. Corney's history and memory reading seminar, as well as Dr. Kern's material culture seminar both impacted the ways I viewed this project as it developed. Both changed how I thought about the sources I did have, and how I could use the landscape itself, and the physical presence of the cemetery as sources even where written records were lacking. In particular, they gave me new ways to think about information that seemed mundane, such as internment reports from National Cemetery superintendents that provided little personal information about soldier burials beyond their name, rank,

unit, and date of death.

To publish this paper I would certainly want to continue to pursue research in the National Park's records. In particular, the intern I corresponded with mentioned there were records pertaining to discussions of removing the National Cemetery, which would be extremely useful to my project. Additionally, I would like to do more secondary source reading to provide more national context for what, in its source base, is something of a microstudy.

Perhaps more importantly though, I also think this project is a potential avenue of expansion for my dissertation, given I want to look at Civil War memory in national spaces, and in particular in sites like National Cemeteries. At the moment, I am interested in potentially comparing Yorktown to two sites I know of, the first at Ft. Raleigh National Historic Site, which is also interpreted as a colonial space though it was home to a freedman's community during the Civil War. Like Yorktown, the local population still has deep ties to that freedmen's community. Another site I only recently learned about while attempting to unearth more information about a soldier whose gravestone seems to be inaccurate at Yorktown. (It not only misidentifies the soldier, but also does not mention that his wife is interred with him.) The soldier listed on the grave stone today actually died in 1865 in Louisiana and was interred at Chalmette National Cemetery. I had the opportunity to discuss this Yorktown project with the current Chief Historian of the park that oversees Chalmette, and she informed me that they similarly had a freedmen's community outside of their cemetery. In this case, the African American community provided a docent program touring the battlefield in the 1960s, adding an interesting layer to ideas of black involvement in Civil War commemoration.

While this is temporally far beyond my intended scope, it seems that it might be an interesting site of comparison, especially in terms of the early twentieth century when African Americans were still largely excluded from national spaces and national memory.

Of course, these two projects are united in their focus on National Parks, and on their research questions related to local populations displaced by the parks. More broadly though, I think they both identify the ways in which National Parks can become sites of consensus and conflict. Even where conflict is not as explicit as burning residents' homes before their eyes as occurred in Shenandoah, they become sites of rhetorical conflict and national discourse. Though I had not intended on focusing my research on National Parks, I am struck by the idea that even before the formal creation of the NPS in 1916, Americans viewed national public spaces as civic sites that could build a particular citizenry and contribute to a particular vision of the country. Moreover, I am interested in examining the ways in which cultural use of these spaces allowed for marginalized groups to imprint their own memories and identities on the nation, and argue for their place within American society.

“In the Bosom of the Storied Blue Ridge Mountains:”  
Contesting the Future of American Culture in Shenandoah National Park, 1924-1936

*"This Park, therefore, together with its many sisters which are coming to completion in every part of our land, is in the largest sense a work of conservation. Through all of them we are preserving the beauty and the wealth of the hills, and the mountains and the plains and the trees and the streams. Through all of them we are maintaining useful work for our young men. Through all of them we are enriching the character and happiness of our people."*

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dedication of Shenandoah National Park, July 3, 1936

*"This State is demonstrating that we have a great and honorable past upon which, with renewed confidence, we may proceed to build an even greater and more honorable future."*

Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, Dedication of Shenandoah National Park, July 3, 1936

Of the creation of Shenandoah National Park, former resident Estelle Nicholson Dodson remembered, “We thought it was the finest thing in the world. But that wasn’t true.”<sup>1</sup> When news first arrived that an area of the Blue Ridge Mountains in western Virginia would be converted into a national park, many residents viewed it as a positive change. Like those already in the West, a park could bring much needed revenue, a new focus on infrastructure, and a sense of protection to an area often overlooked by government officials. What residents like Dodson could not know was that in the decade long process of establishing the new park, they would become increasingly unwelcome within the park and broader American culture. In their efforts to create Shenandoah National Park, officials hoped to preserve and rehabilitate the natural resources of the mountains and to enshrine a place that would contribute to their image of the nation’s future progress by providing a convenient wilderness escape. They conceived of this

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<sup>1</sup> Katrina Powell, *The Anguish of Displacement: The Politics of Literacy in the Letters of Mountain Families in Shenandoah National Park*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 32.

future as one characterized by urbanization, participation in mass culture, and mechanized industry. The park itself, while providing an escape, would also represent a triumph of American ingenuity in the ability of federal workers to make the rough country accessible to automobiles and tourists. Mountain residents, dependent upon the land and engaged in a largely agricultural economy, did not fit this vision. To justify forced relocation of mountain residents, and to further their arguments of what parts of American cultural history needed to be preserved and perpetuated, park supporters, government officials, and sociologists would craft and disseminate an image of the residents as backwards, underdeveloped, and wholly separate from the modern United States.

While historians and archeologists have recently undermined these early twentieth century depictions of mountain residents, rhetoric of the era betrays more than a desire to dismiss mountaineers as unfit to live on their own. Within the texts published by commentators studying mountain people and the rhetoric of park creators remains an underlying argument for the proper state of national culture. In their opinions about the park and against mountain life, writers assumed that citizens of the United States needed to participate in a particular culture that was developing along a specific trajectory and defined by certain boundaries they believed should be universal. Often these boundaries were defined not by explicit explanations of what should be, but rather through images of what culture should *not* be, as demonstrated by descriptions of mountain life. A reconsideration of the studies that condemned mountaineers, and the arguments made for the park reveals a vision of the United States that proponents hoped to instill in the American public by creating a model national park. Mountain culture did not fit this

vision, and it was imperative to not only prove that point, but solidify the apparent supremacy of the industrialized culture officials hoped to codify.

Recent studies have begun to disprove the myth of the backward mountaineer that has held sway over the American imagination for almost a century. Historian Katrina Powell published one of the most extensive studies of Shenandoah National Park archival materials, particularly written correspondence between park residents and officials in the era of its creation. Her 2007 work, *The Anguish of Displacement: the Politics of Literacy in the Letters of Mountain Families in Shenandoah National Park*, takes specific issue with the image of the illiterate mountaineer, illustrating not only that park residents could and did read and write, but further that they used those skills to combat caricatures of themselves presented in contemporary media. According to Powell, state and federal government officials used claims of a large, illiterate mountain population to further their efforts to displace residents.<sup>2</sup> Utilizing turn of the century rhetoric of reform that depicted poor whites, particularly in the post-Civil War South, as “semi-civilized” and “ignorant,” park proponents convinced politicians and businessmen of the need to relocate mountain residents based on a paternalistic impulse that suggested not only the immediate benefits to residents, but also that it was “good for the general rebuilding of the South.”<sup>3</sup>

Powell also illustrates how the process of the park’s creation was complicated at best, and at times outright impossible to decipher. Congress had authorized a national park in the East in 1907, and for more than a decade efforts laid almost entirely dormant.

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<sup>2</sup> Powell, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Powell, 22.

In the 1920s, officials took up the cause again, surveying various areas to recommend proper locations for this new park. By 1924, the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee and Virginia businessmen had determined the Shenandoah mountain section would be an attractive location not only because of its natural beauty but also the role it could play in industrial development in Virginia.<sup>4</sup> Two years later Congress authorized the new park, along with a sister park in the Great Smoky Mountains, and another survey took place in which park officials attempted to persuade residents to sell their land willingly. This initiated a long process of confusion, misunderstanding, and shifting authority that culminated with total displacement.<sup>5</sup>

Virginia utilized the Land Condemnation Act to acquire privately owned property which the state would eventually donate to the federal government. During this early period, Powell explains, policy makers did not fully grasp how many people actually lived in the mountains, as the area had been portrayed as an untouched wilderness in survey reports. Complicating efforts further, construction of the park's main road, Skyline Drive, began in 1931 through the use of easements. Though this project began four years prior to the park's official transfer to the National Park Service in 1935, President Hoover authorized the use of drought relief funds for its production.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Powell, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Congress' authorization for Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks stipulated that the federal government could not acquire the land outright, but rather that it must be either donated by private landowners or purchased by the states and transferred later. The areas ultimately included in Shenandoah were attained haphazardly, and administered by various entities in the years preceding transfer to the National Park Service in 1935. Consequently, policies about land use while residents remained on the land, in particular, changed regularly making it difficult for residents to comply and nearly impossible for the Park Service to effectively communicate.

<sup>6</sup> Powell, 34. Hoover's roll in the park's creation is particularly intriguing. He famously established a summer retreat in the Shenandoah Mountains called Camp Rapidan. The camp is still standing and park visitors can tour it in the summer months before snow makes it inaccessible to park vehicles.

As Powell skillfully demonstrates, during this period of transformation, park residents attempted to use resources like literacy to mediate the changes and to combat their growing reputation as inhospitable and disagreeable. To do so, they drew upon rhetoric surrounding the park, proving not only their literacy, but their ability to engage with the culture of conservation and citizenship that would ultimately be used to condemn them. Powell explains,

Men and women alike represented themselves as sharing values of conservation. Men volunteered to care for the land and women evoked a sense of community values. A constant reestablishment of themselves as worthy citizens indicates their continual battle to be seen by those in authority as citizens with valid concerns and requests, and who deserved. . . acknowledgment from the government.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps their success in the efforts made it all the more imperative that officials and park proponents convince the American public that the paternalistic impulse was still warranted. In the years following the park's authorization, particularly between 1930 and 1935, conversations evolved that depicted residents of the western mountains as not only set apart from modern American culture, but in a consistent state of devolution.

Archaeologist Audrey Horning has also taken significant steps to disprove ideas that mountain residents were unconnected from American culture. Her 2002 article, "Myth, Migration, and Material Culture: Archaeology and the Ulster Influence on Appalachia" and her subsequent 2004 book, *In the Shadow of Ragged Mountain:*

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<sup>7</sup> Powell, 89.

*Historical Archaeology of Nicholson, Corbin, and Weakley Hollows*, break down early twentieth century conceptions of mountain residents as of exclusively Scotch-Irish decent, and provide concrete evidence that many of the “studies” published in the early 1930s that portrayed the mountains as wholly lacking modern culture are not supported by the archeological record. Horning explains that caricatures of mountain people evolved from “19<sup>th</sup>-century writings of local colorists, whose fictional portrayals have become accepted truth.”<sup>8</sup> These ideas held the public’s imagination because “the notion that residents of Appalachia were living an unaltered pioneer lifestyle both appealed to the curiosity but repelled the sensibilities of America’s new industrial middle class.”<sup>9</sup>

Horning’s findings refute many of the traditional stereotypes of mountain residents, such as the idea that they still resided in the same homes their ancestors had built in the colonial period. They did in fact live in log cabins, but Horning explains, “these cabins were constructed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century [and reflect] a downturn in local economic conditions.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, documentation of the area in the 1930s revealed what Horning has termed, “successful ecological adaptation,” in the form of “substantial landscape engineering. . . such as terracing, riverbank stabilization, extensive rock clearance, and the use of specialized tools.”<sup>11</sup> This assertion is particularly significant, as one of the main argument leveled against residents was an accusation that they were unable to properly utilize the natural resources surrounding them.

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<sup>8</sup> Audrey Horning, “Myth, Migration, and Material Culture: Archaeology and the Ulster Influence on Appalachia,” *Historical Archaeology* 36, no. 4 (2002): 129.

<sup>9</sup> Horning, “Myth, Migration, and Material Culture,” 129.

<sup>10</sup> Horning, “Myth, Migration, and Material Culture,” 132.

<sup>11</sup> Horning, “Myth, Migration, and Material Culture,” 134.

Further, Horning's work countered the claim that mountain residents existed in isolation from modern American culture. Surface collections testified through the presence of a "variety of goods," that Shenandoah residents actively participated in "American consumer culture." Some examples included, "commercial food and beverage containers, pharmaceutical bottles, automobile parts; leisure items such as 78 rmp records; and toys, including model trains, trucks, and even a mock ray gun [that] instantly contradicted the dire portrait of early-20<sup>th</sup>-century life as drawn by journalists and sociologists."<sup>12</sup> Though Horning and Powell have both successfully disproved many of the enduring caricatures of mountain and culture, the question remains: why were these ideas useful in their time? What was at stake that compelled sociologists and park supporters to paint such a bleak picture of mountain life? In examining contemporary sources with an eye to what values their assumptions reveal, it becomes unmistakable that at the heart of this effort were arguments about the proper future of American culture. These images of mountain people served as both a foil to and warning for a modernizing United States, insisting on what kinds of culture the nation needed and how national parks could help create and sustain that culture.

As newspapers picked up the idea of Shenandoah National Park and reported the progress of its selection to the nation, they emphasized its proximity to the capital in Washington, D.C. and the benefits that location could provide to citizens. In an article with the subtitles, "Committee Seeks Washington's Share for Great Playground of the District," and "By Drawing Tide to Capital, Patriotism Stimulus is Seen," the *Washington*

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<sup>12</sup> Horning, "Myth, Migration, and Material Culture," 138.

*Post* reported that the creation of a park in Shenandoah could help make Washington, D.C. the “great, predominant capital which has been prophesized for it since earliest days.” Park proponents hoped that having an exceptional park in the East would stem the tide of tourism to the West, “bringing the country within the historical influence which the Capital diffuses,” and “the East and its traditions.” The effect of this redirection, they claimed, would spread American traditions and revive interest in American history.<sup>13</sup>

Specifying the nature of American history supporters hoped visitors would find in and around Shenandoah, the article went on to depict the “glory” of Virginia’s significant past. Describing wanderers meandering through the Virginia wilderness and stumbling upon Montpelier – located between D.C. and Shenandoah’s northern entrance at Luray – proponents felt sure that these places had “the spirit of the past locked within [their] walls,” and that though “there’s a sadness about [them] of glory fled, [they] stand as embodiment[s] of glory.”<sup>14</sup> Just by visiting these places, these arguments held, citizens could absorb a sense of patriotism personified by founding patriots.

Invoking an argument reminiscent of modern studies highlighting the economic value of parks, the same article also emphasized the fiscal benefits of a park in the East, asserting that parks in the West were largely responsible for rapid industrial growth in their respective regions. In case readers were not swayed by the promise of America’s past, they were sure to support America’s industrial future. “The business men of Washington,” unnamed in the article, enthusiastically supported this new Eastern

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<sup>13</sup> “SHENANDOAH PARK’S VALUE AND BEAUTY BEING URGED HERE: Committee Seeks Washing- Ton’s Share for Great Play- Ground of District. FLOOD OF TOURISTS EXPECTED FOR CITY By Drawing Tide to Capital, Patriotism Stimulus Is Seen,” *The Washington Post*, March 28, 1926, 8.

<sup>14</sup> “Shenandoah Park’s Value and Beauty,” 8.

experiment as it would most certainly be a financial boon. Furthermore, creation of a park in Virginia's mountains would stimulate the building of roads through Virginia, necessary to connect its urban east with the more rural west, passing through sites like Montpelier, and generating infrastructure to ensure a vibrant future.<sup>15</sup>

Once Congress settled on Shenandoah, the *Washington Post* echoed these claims, stressing again its proximity to sites of American history and the capital. In December of 1924, the *Post* noted in particular the location of Revolutionary and Civil War battlefields and claimed that the selected tract was within a reasonable distance from "700 square miles of historic spots." Going so far as to claim that on a clear day the Washington Monument would be visible from the not yet constructed "'skyline' roadway" that would crest the mountains, the article asserted that this reality was the determining factor in the park's selection.<sup>16</sup> Quoting a speech given in favor of the park, it stressed the idea that the development of Washington, D.C. as a capital "befitting. . . our great nation" must also mean developing the city's surroundings. This was necessary to ensure that the capital would "express the ideals and beauty" of the country.<sup>17</sup>

Initial reports on the selection of the mountain region took for granted the easy relocation of local populations, assuming the benefit of the park to the nation would surely prompt landowners to surrender their property. In an almost dismissive claim, *The Washington Post* declared, "No estimate of the cost of establishing the park was made by the committee. But Representative Temple declared his belief that constructive

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<sup>15</sup> "Shenandoah Park's Value and Beauty," 8.

<sup>16</sup> "New National Park Will be Created in Virginia," *The Washington Post*, December 14, 1924, 1.

<sup>17</sup> "New National Park Will be Created in Virginia," 12.

cooperation between Virginia officials and land owners will result in the acquirement of needed land at reasonable prices and the donation of other sections.”<sup>18</sup> The significant national benefits this great eastern park could provide seemed to ensure that all parties involved would be easily persuaded to sacrifice their personal claims for the sake of the state.

In the years preceding Shenandoah’s official founding in 1935, a disjointed process of land acquisition and management brought confusion and tension to the mountain residents and government officials tasked with settling their concerns. Though park development began prior to 1935, particularly with the construction of Skyline Drive, the National Park Service did not gain official jurisdiction until that year. Other organizations, including the state of Virginia, administered the land haphazardly, and the NPS found it impossible to properly inform residents of rules that were ultimately inconsistent. This led both to an exasperation among officials with the mountain residents who they felt were incapable of following the rules, and a sense among residents that they had been deceived when government promises were not kept or were miscommunicated. Complications with the development of other parks, especially the Great Smoky Mountains National Park where landowners were sometimes given lifetime leases on their land, caused NPS officials to change policies towards Shenandoah residents as development progressed.<sup>19</sup>

To strain matters further, government officials could not conceptualize the

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<sup>18</sup> “New National Park Will be Created in Virginia,” 1.

<sup>19</sup> Audrey J. Horning. *In the Shadow of Ragged Mountain: Historical Archaeology of Nicholson, Corbin, & Weakley Hollows*. Luray, VA: Shenandoah National Park Association, 2004, 100.

particular circumstances of the mountain residents, and did not understand how residents were unskilled in seemingly simple matters like making loan payments on new homesteads. At the center of this tension was a basic collision of cultures that seemed incapable of communicating across divides. Mountains residents had been used to and highly skilled at subsisting off the land, and had not needed to do activities such as make loan payments on property they had inhabited for decades if not centuries. Government officials, conversely, existed in a world where development and banking were common activities, taking for granted “civilized” people’s abilities to navigate those spheres. When residents failed to follow procedures and rules expected of them, officials presumed they were generally lawless or mentally incapable of doing so.<sup>20</sup>

It is impossible to know with certainty what inspired scientists who ventured into the park during its development period to write such clearly false studies about the mountain residents. But it is apparent that they were aware of, if not at times funded by, the park project and knew the stakes of relocation ran high. Moreover, they were products of their time, participants in a national culture that assumed certain markers of civilization must be present for a people to be classified as part of America’s developing future. Early studies of the mountaineers’ past and present charted a historical trajectory in which early pioneers were an integral part of the United States’ mythical expansion era and triumph, but who in their decision to settle in the rugged mountains got left behind sometime later and missed the opportunity to continue to develop into the industrialized nation Americans believed they had achieved by the early twentieth century. Media

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<sup>20</sup> Katrina M. Powell, *The Anguish of Displacement: The Politics of Literacy in the Letters of Mountain Families in Shenandoah National Park*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009, 44-5.

sources, intent on following the park's development and convincing the public of its merits, echoed these beliefs, disseminating them to the larger public and creating what seemed to be a resounding condemnation of mountain culture that justified relocation to assure that these people left behind might have the chance to join America's future.

These perceptions were reflected in histories written about the park following its establishment which tied white settlement of the Shenandoah region to larger national narratives of the United States' inception, development, and expansion. *Legends of the Skyline Drive*, published in 1937 to educate the public about the park, began by detailing the story of the Knights of the Golden Horseshoe, an exploratory party sent to the western fringes of colonial Virginia by Governor Alexander Spotswood. When they returned to the East with glowing tales of beautiful lands, pioneering spirits like Adam Miller abandoned plans to move to Williamsburg, Virginia, and instead set off for the Shenandoah Valley. In authors Carrie Hunter Willis and Etta Belle Walker's conception, Miller was representative of traditional colonial Americans, as he had left religious persecution and social unrest in Germany to settle in the colonies.<sup>21</sup> Early settlers like Miller and his family brought with them all the trappings of grand old Virginia, furnishing their mountain homes with "priceless early American furniture," described as, "rosewood and later Empire furniture. . . early Dutch tables, chairs, platters, plates of Delft and pewter."<sup>22</sup> A contemporary of Miller's, John VanMeter, was described as a "shrewd trader from New York," who had hunted in Virginia with native Delawares.

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<sup>21</sup> Carrie Hunter Willis and Etta Belle Walker, *Legends of the Skyline Drive and the Great Valley of Virginia*. Richmond, Va.: The Dietz press, 1937, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Willis and Walker, 6.

VanMeter found himself drawn to Virginia by the fertile land he encountered on these excursions and predictably relocated from New York to the Shenandoah region.<sup>23</sup>

George Washington also featured prominently in this early history of the Shenandoah region. According to Willis and Walker, one of Washington's first assignments was to survey the land of the Blue Ridge Mountains. During his efforts he learned "knowledge of frontier life and a reputation for dependability and self-confidence," which would serve him well in his early successes in the French and Indian Wars.<sup>24</sup>

As the United States blossomed as a nation, so too, it appeared, did the Shenandoah region and its inhabitants. "Peace and prosperity" came to the region following the Revolutionary War, and along with it "finer horses and carriages." These trappings of colonial high culture came to the Valley by way of a toll road, built and maintained by "some thrifty soul." This road earned the reputation of being the pride not just of the Valley, but of all of Virginia, for its beauty, ingenuity, and apparent financial success.<sup>25</sup>

Even more recent park interpretive guides chart this narrative process of America's steady march westward and testified to the endurance of this mythological mountain memory. According to author John Connors, who published a guide book in 1988, early settlers who migrated to the Valley under Governor Spotswood's land grant

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<sup>23</sup> Willis and Walker, 9-10.

<sup>24</sup> Willis and Walker, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Willis and Walker, 32.

program established the “present cultural landscape.”<sup>2627</sup> By 1734 the first documented white settler had arrived within the boundary that would eventually encompass the National Park.<sup>28</sup> Along with the growth of the Valley Pike lauded by Willis and Walker, two other turnpikes were established during this early period and the population continued to grow. Traditional markers of early development dotted the landscape, including steam-powered mills and tanneries that blossomed in the wake of the Civil War. In 1882, even a railroad connected growing Shenandoah industry to a wider world.<sup>29</sup>

By 1925, though, Conners noted, at least half of the mountain population had left following a massive chestnut blight which weakened the timber industry.<sup>30</sup> Conners echoed the sentiments of early twentieth-century hikers who seemed oblivious to the development that had occurred over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Describing the land as “unpopulated and pristine” observers and interpreters implied that the populations that once inhabited the mountains did not alter their landscape or utilize the resources at hand. Without mentioning the role the park’s creation played in the displacement of mountain residents, Conners commented that of the 6,000 people known to have been living in the area immediately before the park’s

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<sup>26</sup> Conners, John A. *Shenandoah National Park: An Interpretive Guide*. Blacksburg, Va.: McDonald & Woodward PubCo, 1988. Conners does not appear to have been associated directly with the National Park Service, but the opening of his book credits manuscript suggestions and review to seven park personnel members suggesting that his efforts were aided and supported by Shenandoah NP.

<sup>27</sup> Conners’ reference to the “present cultural landscape” is intriguing. By 1988, the year of the guide book’s publication, much of the park had been “restored” to a state of wilderness. Almost all of the residential structures had been successfully eradicated, so the referring to “present cultural landscape” as the work of mountaineers suggested that even when settlers lived in the area they had done little to cultivate and develop it.

<sup>28</sup> Conners, 86.

<sup>29</sup> Conners, 88.

<sup>30</sup> Conners, 89.

establishment, “about half of these people would leave.” Of those that were left, “most . . . were probably simple, hardworking country folk.”<sup>31</sup>

Conners continued to dilute the memory of the park’s creation and conflicts with mountain residents. He claimed that “most mountain folk appreciated the opportunity to sell and relocate.” Of the seeming few who were “adamant about remaining” in their homes, Conners depicted their displeasure as detrimental not only to the Park Service but to the park land itself. “Forest fires started by mountain people plagued the early years of the Park,” explained Conners. Their history, for reasons unmentioned by Conners, had mostly disappeared from the park’s landscape after these initial conflicts, as “most of the old homes were torn down or allowed to decay.” Contradicting his early description of the park land as untouched, Conners dismissively moved on from the mountain people to describe the extreme rehabilitation efforts undertaken by the Park Service to restore forests to their perceived natural state. In his estimation, “over a century of heavy abuse had decimated the forests and wildlife and gullied the soils.” Accordingly, Shenandoah became a “long-term experiment” in the ability of mankind to “restore” an environment to its “natural” state.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Conners refuted a few aspects of early narratives of the park’s creation, but by and large perpetuated many of the myths that had plagued the park’s history for decades.

One of the first studies of Shenandoah residents to reach a national audience appeared in the *Journal of Geography* in 1931—the same year construction began on Skyline Drive—and depicted a bleak situation in the mountain settlements. Author

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<sup>31</sup> Conners, 89.

<sup>32</sup> Conners, 90.

Margaret Hitch assumed that not only would the image be unattractive to more cultured public audiences, but further that the mountain residents were too isolated to recognize the perceived deficiencies of their world.<sup>33</sup> Hitch's focus on material objects and their scarcity in the "Blue Ridge Hollow" betrayed her bias that cultural objects were the markers of advanced civilization and development. Significantly, from the outset Hitch acknowledged that the hollows on which she focused would be included in the park once relocation was completed.

Here in the mountain hollows, Hitch argued, were a people at once isolated from civilization and yet within reach of a broader world if they should only be willing to venture beyond their wooded boundaries. "At night," Hitch narrated, "one may watch the lights of autos skimming along a highway between populous towns of the 'outside,' yet sit within this secluded, backward hollow so difficult of access."<sup>34</sup> She delineated between various communities and her assessment of their "stage of civilization," noting that the more developed hollows did in fact have cars – which she remarked were "purchased second-hand, of course" – and trucks.<sup>35</sup> Admitting that cars were not the most conducive to navigating the mountains' steep and rocky terrain, she also mentioned that the "most usual form of transport" was a "horse drawn 'slide,' or sled."<sup>36</sup> In what can only be read as a flare for the dramatic, Hitch claimed that children in the lesser hollows had never seen cars, and described a conversation with a young girl who saw a train for the first time and did not recognize it though train whistles in the Shenandoah

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<sup>33</sup> Margaret Hitch, "Life in a Blue Ridge Hollow," *Journal of Geography* XXX (1931), 309.

<sup>34</sup> Hitch, 313.

<sup>35</sup> Hitch 317.

<sup>36</sup> Hitch, 315.

Valley could be heard up in the mountains.<sup>37</sup> This assessment assumed that while Hitch herself could easily pass between the mountain communities along the various roads that connected them, inhabitants themselves were either too lazy or too content to venture far enough to glimpse these modern marvels. In these lesser hollows, she claimed, “shiftlessness and laziness seemed so evident,” that this lack of motivation to experience the world was clear.<sup>38</sup>

Hitch also commented on the economic industry of the mountain residents, taking stock of what she viewed were marketable outlets and opportunities to evaluate how well landowners had taken advantage of their resources. Negating her earlier image of a people who never ventured into the more developed valley, Hitch noted that mountain men would sometimes leave their immediate areas to find “work cutting wood or building trails and roads.”<sup>39</sup> When other avenues of employment were not available, men would make baskets. However, Hitch concluded, this could not be very lucrative because the “chief market is of course outside the mountains,” where, presumably, they refused to go.<sup>40</sup> In some cases residents maintained orchards, and Hitch believed these could have been developed further had residents been more industrious. With the imminent arrival of the park, she acknowledged, this avenue would never materialize.<sup>41</sup>

In her concluding remarks, Hitch recognized that significant commercial

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<sup>37</sup> Hitch, 320. Audrey Horning’s archeological study proves that not only were cars present in the hollow communities, but also that children had toy cars as well as training, indicating that Hitch’s assertion that children could not identify trains was unfounded.

<sup>38</sup> Hitch, 315.

<sup>39</sup> Hitch, 318. Though she does not specify, Hitch’s reference to “building trails and roads” probably referred to finding employment building Skyline Drive. Construction of the drive began before formal park creation through the use of easements, and locals were often employed in the process.

<sup>40</sup> Hitch, 318.

<sup>41</sup> Hitch, 319.

development had already taken place in the mountains. Her interpretation of this reality was that it had enabled a new means of “outside contact” as hikers and vacationists visited the “nearby resort” and the Appalachian Trail.<sup>42</sup> Overall, Hitch believed, the lack of familiarity with the outside world she viewed as endemic within local populations would inhibit their ability to adjust to “other environments.” In sum, Hitch’s estimation of the problem was two-fold: mountain residents were not familiar enough with “modern” American culture to adjust and as a result were likewise unable to see the ostensible benefits of moving outside their region.

Another article appeared in *Child Development* in 1932, claiming to be representative of a study begun in 1929, “to determine the cultural influences which affect intellectual, emotional, and personality development and the influences determining the attitudes of mountain people living in relative degrees of isolation.”<sup>43</sup> Like the earlier 1931 publication, “The Intelligence of Isolated Mountain Children” focused on four hollows located in the vicinity of the Skyland resort. Rather than delineating the levels of civilization of two communities though, “The Intelligence of Isolated Mountain Children” examined four hollows which the authors, Mandel Sherman and Cora Key, believed exhibited unequal degrees of socialization and development. Perpetuating the image of the pre-colonial pioneer suspended in time, the article opened with a description of the “log and mud cabins” built when settlers first arrived in the

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<sup>42</sup> Hitch, 322. The “nearby resort” to which Hitch refers is Skyland, an area that took the focus of park proponents, developers, and researchers

<sup>43</sup> Mandel Sherman and Cora B. Key, “The Intelligence of Isolated Mountain Children,” *Child Development*, 3, 1932, 279.

mountains which they still inhabited.<sup>44</sup>

Beginning with Colvin Hollow, the lowest socially in Sherman and Key's estimation, the authors described each community and the markers they believed relegated them to their particular social status. In Colvin Hollow, the adults were illiterate, and many of the inhabitants descended from the "original settlers who married relatives and mixed very little" with outsiders. Implying that the families were in fact inbred and consequently biologically inferior, they noted that the family ties were so close children did not know, or need to know, their last names because too many shared the same one.<sup>45</sup> Needles Hollow, the next "more socialized" community received little attention, the authors noting that "many of the adults are literate" and "the children have had good school advantages." Oakton Hollow seemed remarkably different, boasting of "a combined general store and post-office and many of the inhabitants receive mail and an occasional magazine." The presence of these institutions which would allow for exchange with "outsiders" and participation through magazines in a larger popular culture ensured that "there exist[ed] a greater social consciousness than in Colvin or Needles Hollow." Rigby Hollow also received little attention, presumably because its social exception was obvious with the statement, "approximately 75 percent of the inhabitants are literate."<sup>46</sup>

After describing the environment of their study, Sherman and Key began their analysis of the intelligence of the mountain culture, attributing inhabitants' perceived lack

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<sup>44</sup> Sherman and Key, 279. This specific contention was explicitly disproved in Horning's study in which she found mountain residents often lived in twentieth century log cabins.

<sup>45</sup> Sherman and Key, 279.

<sup>46</sup> Sherman and Key, 280.

of development to a lack of proper cultural stimuli in their surroundings. According to the authors, “Colvin Hollow children failed most frequently in tests involving calculation, in part because the terms were foreign to them,” echoing their implication that the Colvin Hollow children in their position as the most stagnated community, were also biologically inferior.<sup>47</sup> The article included a photograph of three children with the caption, “The majority of these children show strabismus [crossed-eyes], and one of the children shown in this picture is forced to hold his head high and to the right in order to see because of his squint.”<sup>48</sup> The authors reserved these particular observations about biology to Colvin Hollow, as if only here severe cultural stagnation had given way to biological corruption.

Sherman and Key rejected the idea that the mountain residents were collectively “‘degenerate’ and their children. . . therefore ‘expected to be retarded intellectually.’” Rather they concluded that the environment and the lack of connection to a wider social world was responsible for preventing mountain children from developing more sophisticated levels of intelligence.<sup>49</sup> Their assessment implied that mountain culture was inherently inferior to American culture in urban areas, and that should children be exposed to these additional social benefits, their intelligence would naturally improve.

By far the most comprehensive study of mountain culture, Mandel Sherman and Thomas Henry published *Hollow Folk* in 1933. In her introduction of the book, educator Fay-Cooper Cole described the oft-repeated attributes of the mountains in an effort to

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<sup>47</sup> Sherman and Key, 284.

<sup>48</sup> Sherman and Key, 284.

<sup>49</sup> Sherman and Key, 289.

justify their selection for the study. In the mountains one could find a people left behind, “near [geographically] to civilization, yet strangely isolated,” who, as a result of this isolation had, “undergone steady deterioration.” Their separation, according to Cole, provided a group of people who had developed “under conditions close to laboratory control,” presumably untouched by cultural influences outside of their borders and thus ripe for a study of human development.<sup>50</sup> Sherman and Thomas’ observations recorded a deeply ingrained bias about the markers of cultural development which they looked for and judged throughout their visit to the mountains.

Most strikingly, the authors repeatedly referenced the extent to which a group of people was connected to broader American culture through feelings of alliance to the American nation. They opened their study by stating that, “the ragged children, until 1928, never had seen the flag or heard the Lord’s Prayer.” Despite their relative proximity to “the center of American civilization,” that is, Washington, D.C., the community was “completely cut off from the current of American life.”<sup>51</sup> Sherman and Henry contrasted this apparent state of disconnection with the town of Briarsville, which they claimed consisted primarily of former mountain residents who had migrated into civilization and developed a more sophisticated culture belonging to the twentieth century. In Briarsville, “all the common American games are played and there is a systematic knowledge of national politics.”<sup>52</sup> Later in their book, the authors took aim at familiarity with significant moments in United States history, and implied that the lack of

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<sup>50</sup> Mandel Sherman and Thomas R Henry, *Hollow Folk*, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1933, v.

<sup>51</sup> Sherman and Henry, 1.

<sup>52</sup> Sherman and Henry, 8.

proper reverence for these events relegated mountain communities to a world apart.

Though they observed an “urchin’s [child’s] face brightened in response to the name of Abraham Lincoln. . . neither the recent World War nor the Civil War signified anything to any of the children. . . the great world cataclysm left Colvin Hollow unaffected.”<sup>53</sup>

This statement, like many others, seems suspect at best, as it is unlikely that either of the two wars mentioned truly left the mountain residents “unaffected.” Men in the hollows had served in World War I, and the Civil War came to the Shenandoah region in the form of major military campaigns and smaller guerilla conflicts.<sup>54</sup> Despite its apparent inaccuracy, though, Sherman and Henry’s focus on these historical events suggests that knowledge of major national moments, as well as a demonstrated a sense of allegiance to the American nation through the display of the national flag, were expected indicators of cultural development and participation in the national culture park promoters hoped to foster.

Sherman and Henry also highlighted other perceived indicators of culture, including evidence of music, religion, fashion, superstition and imagination, personal hygiene, and reproductive health. Overall, they concluded, mountain residents were too insistent upon maintaining their backwards way of life to recognize their deficiency.<sup>55</sup> In the estimation of the researchers, no original music could be found in the mountains, and with a few exceptions, little importation of music from outside the hollows could be

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<sup>53</sup> Sherman and Henry, 122.

<sup>54</sup> For example, park resident Rebecca Baugher used her husband’s military service in WWI as evidence that they were good citizens in a letter to her Congressional Representative requesting the use of wood from her former home to build outside the park boundary. Powell, 83.

<sup>55</sup> Sherman and Henry, 16-7.

found. What music did exist, they asserted, had come to the mountains second-hand in the form of objects like an “old phonograph with about a dozen records, the gift of some summer adventurer in the mountains.”<sup>56</sup>

Religion too was non-existent in their appraisal. Citing a man named Clem Needles who had purportedly come to the mountains as a preacher but eventually had been ostracized from the community for his hypocrisy and harsh dealings with his neighbors, Sherman and Henry declared that religion had all but died in the mountains. According to Needles, “the elders have forgotten the gospel [he] taught them and the children have never heard of it.”<sup>57</sup> They attributed this decline again to the environment, claiming,

The hollow dweller has no ordered routine of toil. He is unafflicted [sic] by the weariness of those doing the work of the world; he has no need of a paradise of rest. His affections are much closer to the animal level than in the population at large. Death of loved ones does not plunge him into the depths and darkness of grief which humanity has evolved in the refinement of its emotions, where the only salvation may be promise of immortality.<sup>58</sup>

In this formulation, loss of the symbols of culture was a self-fulfilling prophesy. As “culture deteriorated” so too did one of its features, religion.<sup>59</sup> In concert with religion, Sherman and Henry sought out superstitions and signs of cultural imagination.

Even in their observations about their own unique world, these scientists found

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<sup>56</sup> Sherman and Henry, 50.

<sup>57</sup> Sherman and Henry, 65.

<sup>58</sup> Sherman and Henry, 65.

<sup>59</sup> Sherman and Henry, 66.

the mountaineers wanting. Apparently incapable of making intelligent conclusions about the natural environment that surrounded them, “a city child with kindergarten training probably [knew] more details of nature and nature’s ways than these children of the hills.”<sup>60</sup> This observation perhaps provides the most striking example of the cultural bias at work in Sherman and Henry’s study. It is impossible to believe that a people born and raised in a hard mountain environment had not learned and observed “nature’s ways” – they had to in order to survive. Yet Sherman and Henry demanded a particular kind of knowledge, information gained from textbooks and determined by cultural definitions of scientific understanding.

A lack of connection to broader American culture appeared to be the cause of these deficiencies in the eyes of the researchers. “American life has decidedly influenced our ways of working,” they explained, and “the ‘machine age’ has influenced our attitude towards speed, and the precision with which our lives are regulated makes it necessary that we finish our tasks quickly and decisively.”<sup>61</sup> Yet in the hollows, no such impetus existed. Instead, people moved at a slower pace, unmotivated to excel at their tasks, and incapable of properly caring for the industries to which they had dedicated some level of effort. They improperly cared for the resources they did have, including the apple orchards that dotted the landscape. “Near each hovel are apple trees,” the authors commented, “each bearing two or three bushels of small, wormy fruit. They are unpruned, and covered with caterpillar webs.”<sup>62</sup> Even in instances where the

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<sup>60</sup> Sherman and Henry, 131.

<sup>61</sup> Sherman and Henry, 134.

<sup>62</sup> Sherman and Henry, 42.

environment provided for an outlet of cultivation, then, their caretakers in the mountains were too incompetent to properly cultivate them.<sup>63</sup>

In concluding their findings, Sherman and Henry recognized the imminent approach of the National Park and the impact it would have on the residents they had studied. From their point of view, the people in question had lived for over a century “without contact with law or government.” They predicted that the arrival of the “strong arm of the federal government” would prove to be a difficult transition, because “it is especially hard for a people who have scarcely been aware of the existence of Uncle Sam to comprehend the justice of such treatment.” In their estimation, the coming of the park and the forced relocation of mountain residents to better “civilized” communities was a mercy. Yet the mountain residents were not capable of understanding that this change was clearly better for them.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, Sherman and Henry imagined a world not trapped in time, but rather in a continual process of decline. This was not a people who had never developed culturally, but who instead had gone backwards as a result of their environment and lack of urbanization. In this characterization, the stakes of generating a modern cultural consensus were higher, for if Americans did not actively engage with the right kind of culture, this study suggested they too could be at risk of going backwards. Similarly, the need for relocation took on a new framework, as the solution to the problem of the mountaineers was not eradication but rather incorporation into “civilization.” The myth

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<sup>63</sup> Again, Audrey Horning’s research presents a markedly different image. For example, Horning noted that on the homestead of Israel Hurt, archeologists found, “a wide array of agricultural tools, including a wheat fan and several plows, hoes, and slides; two stills and an apple mill.” Horning, 141.

<sup>64</sup> Sherman and Henry, 214-5.

of the mountaineer that these researchers wove served simultaneously as a lesson of the past and a call for the future, a future that could be aided by the creation of Shenandoah National Park.

As study after study became available for public consumption, newspapers picked up the themes and carried them to a wider national audience. The *New York Times* reported initial news from Sherman's mountain studies in an October, 1930 article entitled, "'Lost' Communities in Blue Ridge Hills: Centres Where Intelligence Practically Is Missing Reported by Psychologists." Beginning with the same refrain as related articles, reporter Elsie Weil opened by noting the 'lost' communities' nearness to Washington, D.C. and their soon inclusion in the new eastern national park. As Sherman and Henry would do in their published version of their findings, *Hollow Folk*, Weil emphasized mountaineers' seeming lack of participation in national culture. She explained, "It is among such people that President Hoover has established on the bank of the Rapidan his model school to give his young neighbors the rudiments of an education. Not more than ten miles away, however, live people who have never even heard of President Hoover."<sup>65</sup> They further implicated themselves in their lack of knowledge about Abraham Lincoln, who, Weil claimed, had been identified by one resident as, "a man over thar keeps one of them things."<sup>66</sup> Despite their lack of knowledge of presidents, these people were "100 per cent Americans," said Weil, descended from the same heroic stock of all colonial pioneers who "intended some day to travel further, but. .

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<sup>65</sup> Elsie Weil, "'Lost' Communities in the Blue Ridge Hills: Centres Where Intelligence Practically is Missing Reported by Psychologists," *New York Times*, October 19, 1930, 128.

<sup>66</sup> Weil, 128.

. never stirred.”<sup>67</sup>

Weil clarified this point by quoting Mandel Sherman, insisting that these Americans were not primitive, but rather a people left behind, moving the wrong direction from proper culture and civilization. Quoting Sherman, she emphasized, “The people here. . . were once highly civilized, but they have become gradually decivilized by environmental conditions. . . the group most remote from contacts with civilization has the lowest level of intelligence. The isolated, decivilized community has no culture with which to compare itself.” Using the same points of reference *Hollow Folk* would illuminate, Weil maintained that these communities lacked post offices – and hence contact with broader culture – stores, paved roads, religion, toys, and sophisticated schools.<sup>68</sup>

Inserting her report into a national conversation, Weil insisted that the state of culture in the mountains, its relation to people’s environments, and the future of Shenandoah National Park were issues with which readers should be concerned. “If the ‘hollow’ people should be dispossessed from their rude cabins and tiny corn patches with the conversion of their mountains into the Shenandoah National Park,” she warned, “they would be pathetically unfit to meet competition and the struggle for existence in the outside world.” By 1930, the park’s creation was already an inevitable reality. Consequently, it is difficult to know what Weil meant in her use of the word “if.” However, as policies towards relocation developed and park creators decided between

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<sup>67</sup> Weil, 128.

<sup>68</sup> Weil, 128. Note also the use of the term “decivilized” rather than “uncivilized.” The conception of the mountaineers as having developed culturally and then going backwards, rather than never developing at all, is echoed in this particular use of terms.

options of granting leases to allow people to stay on their land or forcing total relocation as they ultimately did, it is clear that Weil was correct in her assertion that “this in itself is . . . a serious matter.”<sup>69</sup> Whether her determination of the status of the mountain residents’ intelligence was correct or not, her assertion illuminates the conflicts of culture contemporary Americans believed to be inherent in the process of the park’s creation. Mountain culture did not fit in and could not adapt to modern American life.

Months later, in May of 1932, the *Baltimore Sun* published a strikingly similar story entitled, “The Primitive Life in Modern Virginia: Crisis for Hill Folk.” The article perpetuated images of backwards mountain residents, portraying them as an almost foreign group of people wholly outside of the developing and modern United States. Yet in an ironic twist of the opinion that urban must certainly be better, the article began by proclaiming that “to be efficient in a machine civilization one must get away from it now and then,” to find “refuge from the tyranny of improvements.”<sup>70</sup> Author, J. Hampton, opened her article by describing the journey into the mountain hollows as time travel, lauding the mountain culture for enabling city dwellers the chance to travel from “1931 to 1831, or earlier; back to an era and a mode of living only slightly changed from that of Colonial days. . . where one need never be plagued” by the trappings of modernity – “defective plumbing, crossed wires, [and] telephone calls.” Here, “the juggernaut of modern industry has somehow overlooked and passed by,” and mountain residents would most certainly be “bewildered in the modern industrial world as a tribe of Laplanders

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<sup>69</sup> Weil, 128.

<sup>70</sup> J. Hampton, “The Primitive Life in Modern Virginia: a Crisis for the Hill Folk,” *The Baltimore Sun*, May 1, 1931, 1.

transplanted in Paterson, N.J. Acknowledging the existing controversy over land rights and relocation, the author insisted that once the “tangled claims” had been straightened out, the Shenandoah Mountains would be the perfect escape from the stresses of modern life.<sup>71</sup>

Repeatedly, Hampton highlighted the lack of culture in the mountains as emblematic of the mountain people’s isolation. She quoted Elizabeth Winn, a teacher who had ventured to the mountain schools, stating, “They wring a living with the crudest of implements and with practically no access to outside markets. Although they are, in worldly goods, the poorest of any country folk, they have a sturdy independence and self-respect not usually found among the very poor of cities.”<sup>72</sup> Here again, even in her attempt to compliment the residents she had come to know, Winn reinforced the illusion that mountaineers lacked access to American culture and cultural goods. According to Winn, the lack of engagement in larger markets had discouraged competition, causing mountain products to be substandard. Without “a little outside direction” Winn was sure mountain residents would not be able to be financially successful. Yet she was equally sure that “real industry” could be established, if only it could be introduced to this detached group of people.<sup>73</sup>

On July 3, 1936, Shenandoah’s transition into a National Park became reality. Its dedication ceremony featured all the pomp and circumstance one might expect, in particular the prominent display of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) units responsible

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<sup>71</sup> Hampton, 1.

<sup>72</sup> Hampton, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Hampton, 1-2.

for building much of the infrastructure of the park. Their presence marked the triumph of American industry over this vast wilderness, and suggested hope for the future of a nation still mired in the Great Depression.<sup>74</sup> President Franklin D. Roosevelt opened his speech by expounding upon the “joint husbandry of our human resources and our natural resources.” The CCC, he claimed, had conserved “our priceless heritage of human values by giving hundreds of thousands of men the opportunity for making an honest living.” These men, he pointedly proclaimed, had “ended the idleness of the Shenandoah National Park.” This park would become “a busy and useful place in the years to come.”<sup>75</sup>

Roosevelt contrasted this vision of Shenandoah’s future with an image of its past, reinforcing the same themes the media had been pronouncing for years. He stated, “In by-gone years we have seen the terrible tragedy of our age – the tragedy of waste. . . That was the compelling reason that led us to put our idle people to the task of ending the waste of our land.” In Roosevelt’s summation of Shenandoah’s past, those who had once lived on and enjoyed the land had not done so productively; they had “wasted” the priceless resources for which they had been responsible. With the founding of the park and its incorporation into broader American cultural life, that would change. Through this place, as well as other parks, Roosevelt concluded, Americans would enrich the “character and happiness of our people” and pass on “a stronger Nation.”<sup>76</sup>

Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, repeated these themes of waste and

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<sup>74</sup> For a description of the decorations and audience at the dedication see: “President Dedicates Shenandoah National Park,” *Charlottesville Daily Progress*, July 3, 1936.

<sup>75</sup> “FDR Dedication Speech SNP.” *FDR Dedication of SNP*. Accessed November 12, 2016.

[http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/\\_resources/images/tully/13\\_30.pdf](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/tully/13_30.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

forward progress in his dedication speech. Those “aggressive pioneers” who had come to the mountains first were “lacking in spiritual vision,” explained Ickes. He asked the audience to “imagine with what scorn the rugged individualist who tilled the soil of these eastern states would have regarded any proposal that the necessities of the future required a thoughtful present preservation. . . for the sake of future generations.” These forbearers, he maintained, had not truly understood the best uses of the land, and had lacked “foresight [and an] appreciation of the best use to which some of these areas. . . could be put.”<sup>77</sup> He contrasted these misguided mountaineers with men like John D. Rockefeller, W.T. Grant, and former President Hoover, who had recognized the proper role of the mountains and played an active part in establishing the new national park.<sup>78</sup>

Ickes further incorporated park proponents’ idea that Shenandoah National Park would naturally draw citizens to other historic sites in Virginia where they could learn true American cultural values. He hoped that “every citizen of the United States” would be able to visit the “patriotic shrines with which Virginia abounds” and appreciate the “grace, the charm, and the culture of Virginia life,” exemplified by places such as Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Colonial Williamsburg. In these places visitors could “envisage the manner of life of those early Virginians, to whose inspiration and leadership in such large measure we owe the independence of these United States.” These places provided the necessary link between “the America of the future [and] the best and most significant of the America of the past.”<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Harold Ickes dedication speech, quoted in “President Dedicates Shenandoah National Park,” page 1.

<sup>78</sup> Ickes, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Ickes, 3.

In their dedication speeches, both Roosevelt and Ickes simultaneously rejected the culture of Shenandoah's past, and ceded Shenandoah National Park to the project of creating a modern American cultural identity. Their words assumed that all the charges that had been leveled against mountain residents in the previous ten years had been true – those who had inhabited the mountains had not appreciated them or utilized them productively. With its incorporation into the National Park system as well as the network of historic sites developing in Virginia, the mountains could take their proper place in American culture. From 1936 on, they could serve as the great “playground” park supporters had imagined, a place where urban Americans could escape industrialization just long enough to return as more productive and healthy members of society.

Though Shenandoah's history is particularly fraught, it is not unique. Conflicts over what culture to preserve and what values were most important to the United States' future would continue to develop as more parks came into existence, particularly at Shenandoah's sister park, Great Smoky Mountains.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, these contests still exist. Each year new parks are established, defining and redefining what values and histories Americans should hold most dear. Often, as is the case in Shenandoah, this process homogenizes stories of individuals whose histories are more complicated than the consensus narrative would suggest. Consequently, it is important to recognize that parks, like other public spaces, are products of their time. This reality compels us to interrogate their histories and ask anew what role these places should play in modern American

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<sup>80</sup> Great Smoky Mountains National Park's history is somewhat different than Shenandoah's in that from its inception the park was tasked with the preservation of “mountain culture.” However, competing definitions of mountain culture, particularly marked by the impulse to preserve homes of the affluent rather than the poor, made similar assumptions about the proper types of histories that needed to be preserved.

culture and what memories should be revised to tell a more comprehensive national story.

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## “The Yorktown Problem”: Constructing a Cultural Landscape, 1900-1935

In 2015, Floyd Hill remembered the loss of his community, Uniontown, in Yorktown, Virginia to the expansion of Colonial National Historical Park. Hill recalled that the “only thing we were able to keep was the cemetery.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the physical landscape of the park attests to Hill’s assertion. Visitors to Yorktown National Battlefield who make their way to the National Cemetery are greeted by a disorienting sight. Standing in the parking lot, visitors can see the cemetery, inside a uniform, brick wall. To the left of the National Cemetery stand large earthworks, ostensibly dating from the Revolutionary battle. Perhaps most perplexing, behind the neat walls of the cemetery sit more graves, some raised, some decorated, some with dates worn away by time, and others clearly marked as twentieth-century military veterans. These graves are not protected by the brick wall, or any enclosure and no sign or gate claims them. This is the cemetery Hill referenced. This cemetery originated from a freedmen’s community, known as Uniontown, which grew in the shadow of the Union army during the Civil War, and endured until the National Park Service forcibly removed residents following the establishment of Colonial National Historical Park.<sup>82</sup>

National Park Service administrators sought to remove residents like Hill in an effort to “restore” the Yorktown Battlefield to its 1781 appearance. Park historians deemed the triumph of George Washington over Charles Cornwallis two years before the

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Floyd Hill, 2015. Records of Colonial National Historical Park.

<sup>82</sup> For an aerial image of the site, see Appendix, page 29, image 1. Some documentation and institutional histories refer to this community as “Slabtown,” a name applied to a handful of freedmen’s communities because of their characteristic slab buildings. However, former residents interviewed by representatives of the National Park Service in 2015 exclusively call it “Uniontown,” and reject the name “Slabtown.”

end of the American Revolution a more important historical moment than the 1862 siege of Yorktown or emancipation. Working from this conclusion, they sought to eliminate visual intrusions of alternate narratives on the park landscape in order to tell that story. The founding of the park, and the ways administrators conceptualized the mission of the Yorktown Battlefield, undoubtedly laid the groundwork for ultimate removal of the Uniontown community. Some have regarded this decision as another version of the reconciliationist memory that erased racial implications from Civil War commemoration, asserting that park founders used the Revolution as a screen to avoid Yorktown's other pasts. Yet the process of memory-making was not this straightforward.

Rather, the history of Uniontown and Yorktown demonstrates that sites of memory are always contested, and that meaning is not only inscribed through formal means, such as interpretive signs or government-sponsored events, but is also appropriated and generated through cultural uses of sites of memory. Moreover, the founding of Yorktown National Battlefield reveals that the reconciliationist narrative of erasure does not always hold. Park administrators made decisions for pragmatic, though not unproblematic, reasons, guided by their understanding of what makes history and what is significant in history.<sup>83</sup> Taken collectively, the story of Yorktown and Uniontown demonstrates that the history and goals of national spaces must continually be interrogated and revised to ask what has been erased, and what needs to be uncovered again to generate a more inclusive understanding of the past.

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<sup>83</sup> It could certainly be argued that even these constructions of history maintained underlying assumptions of white supremacy or agency, but the point remains that park administrators did not conceive of their goals as overt attempts to eliminate competing narratives based on racist ideas.

Studies of Civil War memory have tended to position themselves in relation to David Blight's seminal study, *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory*. Published in 2001, Blight's work set the tone for more than a decade of memories studies, arguing that in the years after the Civil War, a consensus image of the war focusing on the shared valor of soldiers dismissed legacies of slavery and race.<sup>84</sup> Caroline Janney undermined this interpretation in her 2013 book, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*. In Janney's telling, the reconciliationist interpretation of the war that Blight illuminated never truly dominated all memorial spaces. Rather, African American communities kept issues of race and slavery present in commemorative activities in the public sphere.<sup>85</sup> Though conceptualized as opposing one another, Blight and Janney's works illuminate two parallel developments of Civil War memory. Blight focuses upon national narratives in national spaces, while Janney's focus on African American communities necessarily highlights developments on the margins of national spaces.

However, M. Keith Harris's 2014 book, *Across the Bloody Chasm: The Culture of Commemoration among Civil War Veterans*, adds an important layer to histories of Civil War commemoration in national spaces such as battlefields. Harris demonstrates that soldiers themselves, particularly Union veterans, were not willing to submit to the idea of mutual honor and brotherhood. Though they may have participated in events such as Blue and Gray reunions, Union soldiers maintained that their cause had been right while

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<sup>84</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>85</sup> Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

the Confederate cause was not. In their eyes, Union veterans had fought a war for freedom, and that fundamental reality could not be written out of memorial events.<sup>86</sup>

Civil War memory studies continues to be a growing field, and historians have taken the three strains of interpretation represented by Blight, Janney, and Harris and applied them to a variety of particular memory sites such as National Cemeteries, Civil War battlefields, and border states. Yet the majority of these studies continue to be viewed in a vacuum, locating arguments in relation one another, and especially in relation to Blight, but not incorporating the insights that broader historiography of memory has to offer. Moreover, they focus on sites explicitly related to the Civil War, often not addressing the ways in which advocates constructed these sites in conversation with other sites of national identity such as National Parks.<sup>87</sup>

Predictably, most historical studies of Yorktown's development as a public space tend to address popular audiences and focus on the triumphal narrative of American independence, placing the National Park in relation to that story.<sup>88</sup> An important exception is Sarah Goldberger's 2010 unpublished dissertation, *Repatriating Yorktown: The Politics of Revolutionary Memory and Reunion*. As the name suggests, Goldberger's study takes Blight's thesis and applies it to happenings at Yorktown, focusing on the 1881 Centennial celebration. According to Goldberger, the Centennial represented a

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<sup>86</sup> M. Keith Harris, *Across the Bloody Chasm: The Culture of Commemoration among Civil War Veterans*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).

<sup>87</sup> For particular examples see: W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Where these Memories Grow: History, Memory, and Southern Identity*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but not the Past: Ladies Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), John R. Neff, *Honoring the Civil War Dead: Commemoration and the Problem of Reconciliation*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2005).

<sup>88</sup> For select examples see Kathleen Manley, *A History of Yorktown and its Victory Celebrations*, (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2005) and Kathleen Manley, *Images of America: Yorktown*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004).

watershed moment of national reconciliation, a moment when the country came together to celebrate its shared heritage while ignoring the recent Civil War and its causes.<sup>89</sup> The continued existence of the Uniontown community after the park's founding in 1931 presented a problem for this consensus image, however, and Goldberger asserts that in the 1970s park promoters achieved what they had wanted all along. By forcibly relocating the last residents of Uniontown from the National Park, administrators achieved the uniform triumph of white American identity on the landscape.<sup>90</sup>

Goldberger's study concludes with the 1881 Centennial, and confines discussion of the lasting identity of the site to the finale of her book. Yet it is this very span between the 1881 moment and the founding of the park where the reconciliationist understanding of Yorktown's history breaks down. Yorktown does not fit this linear narrative of replacement. Rather, it embodies a tension between desires to create a single trajectory of United States history, and the realities of the inherited landscape. The land itself attested to the conflicted history of Virginia's Peninsula, and try as they might to unify the message, park proponents, heritage groups, and historians could not shield visitors from the visual testimony of the landscape. Moreover, African American community members succeeded in inscribing their most fundamental identities within the nation – that of citizens – onto the one part of the built environment that would endure: the cemetery.

As Goldberger illustrates, the Civil War history of Yorktown was tied inextricably to its Revolutionary past from the outset. When Union troops arrived in Yorktown

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<sup>89</sup> Sarah Goldberger, "Repatriating Yorktown: The Politics of Revolutionary Memory and Reunion," Unpublished dissertation, University of Chicago Department of History, 2010.

<sup>90</sup> Goldberger, 244.

during the Peninsula Campaign of 1862, Federal soldiers recognized the significance of the site. Captain Willard Glazier, of the Second New York Cavalry observed that the place seemed “hallowed with the memory of those [Revolutionary] events.”<sup>91</sup> Thomas Osborn, a fellow Union soldier reflected, “We are occupying the same ground which Washington and Lafayette occupied 81 years ago,” and wondered if this new version of Washington’s army could be successful in routing the enemy from Yorktown.<sup>92</sup> Yet even as they reflected on the ties of the site to the past, Union soldiers also witnessed a new and exceptional moment in United States history.

Union occupation of the Virginia Peninsula brought changes the federal government had not anticipated. By the time the Union army arrived at Yorktown, runaway slaves had started to flee to Federal lines on the Peninsula for protection. Writing from Fortress Monroe in July of 1861, Union General Benjamin Butler questioned Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, about these people, wondering if the rebellion had changed their legal status.<sup>93</sup> As Glenn David Brasher has forcefully argued, the presence of these former slaves, labeled “contraband” by Butler and subsequent Congressional legislation, forced the Union army and later the Federal

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Goldberger, 75.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Goldberger, 70.

<sup>93</sup> Benjamin F. Butler to Secretary of War Simon Cameron. July 30, 1861.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1861/08/06/news/slave-question-letter-major-gen-butler-treatment-fugitive-slaves.html?pagewanted=all>. Cameron responded in a letter dated August 8, 1861, “if persons held to service shall be employed in hostility to the United States the right to their services shall be forfeited and such persons shall be discharged there from.” Simon Cameron to Major General Benjamin F. Butler, August 8, 1861. <http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/emancipation/files/2012/07/1861-08-08-Simon-Cameron-to-Benjamin-Butler.pdf>

government to consider the issue of emancipation, ultimately resulting in the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.<sup>94</sup>

Once Federal forces occupied Yorktown the situation was no different; just as they had congregated at Ft. Monroe, African Americans from surrounding communities fled to Yorktown seeking the protection of the Union army. In July of 1863, Union General Isaac Jones Wistar ordered freedmen living in and around Yorktown to provide homes for themselves outside the fort, resulting in the beginnings of the Uniontown community. Wistar estimated that at that time over 12,000 refugees, including women and children, had congregated at Yorktown.<sup>95</sup> In 1864, Union Captain Charles B. Wilder began settling community members on abandoned lands in York and Warwick counties, promising that the government would not return the land to disloyal owners.<sup>96</sup> After the war, President Andrew Johnson ordered Wilder to return the land, initiating a process by which Wilder attempted to buy the land outright, resulting in a court-martial for land speculation. Despite these difficulties, African Americans pooled resources and managed to remain on the land, ensuring that their community would endure after the war ended.<sup>97</sup>

Uniontown was not the only remnant of Union occupation that persisted on Yorktown's landscape at the end of the war's hostilities. In 1862, Union soldiers had started burying fallen comrades in a cemetery later described as "one hundred yards of the spot where the British surrendered."<sup>98</sup> In April of 1862, in light of unprecedented

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<sup>94</sup> Glenn David Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation African Americans and the Fight for Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

<sup>95</sup> Goldberger, 78.

<sup>96</sup> Goldberger, 79-80.

<sup>97</sup> Goldberger, 81.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Goldberger, 89.

casualties, Union policy shifted to allow generals to pick land on battlefields for cemeteries rather than waiting for authorization from the Quartermaster General.<sup>99</sup> This meant that at Yorktown, the decision of where to place the cemetery fell to those on site, and given their awareness of the historical significance of the space, it is hard to imagine that the cemetery's proximity to the place where Cornwallis surrendered to Washington was anything but intentional. In choosing to bury their fallen comrades on the site of Washington's triumph, Union soldiers tied their sacrifice directly to the legacy of the Revolution and the endurance of the nation.

Union officials further wove the Civil War's legacy into a broader system of meaning-making by designating this space at Yorktown a National Cemetery after the war ended. As Catherine Zipf has argued, National Cemeteries served as "architectural monuments to the Union cause," linking their appearance with other post-war projects and projecting renewed Federal authority over the South.<sup>100</sup> Following the end of the war, the Office of the Quartermaster General embarked on a project of beautification and standardization of National Cemeteries beginning in 1867. Montgomery Meigs, the architect of the new designs, created a standard set of visual references such as a flagstaff, rostrum, and superintendent's quarters, that could be replicated across the South.<sup>101</sup> Many of these features, including the keeper's lodge, flagstaff, and iconic brick wall, remain at Yorktown. Thus, both visually and ideologically, these elements grounded individual places in an extensive landscape of national meaning.

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<sup>99</sup> Catherine W. Zipf, "Marking Union Victory in the South: the Construction of the National Cemetery System," in *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*. Edited by Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003.

<sup>100</sup> Zipf, 27.

<sup>101</sup> Zipf, 32.

At Yorktown however, the Uniontown community involved themselves in the memorial legacy of the National Cemetery in a unique way. As early as the 1860s, residents began burying their dead just outside of the walls of the National Cemetery, binding their history to that of the Union cause and perhaps seeking the protection of the watchful eye of the National Cemetery superintendent – always a Union veteran.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, like the Union soldiers, African Americans connected their identity to the nation by placing their dead at the site of Cornwallis’ surrender. This fact became all the more poignant in years to come, when a monument erected by a cemetery superintendent evolved into a marker for the freedmen’s cemetery.<sup>103</sup>

Curious travelers soon began exploring the Virginia Peninsula in the wake of the Civil War, publishing accounts of their opinions of the state of the South and not failing to reflect on the strange confluence of history on display. By some counts, upwards of 40,000 African Americans had settled on the Peninsula, outnumbering whites in places like Yorktown and creating a striking population disparity.<sup>104</sup> Of his travels along the James River, John Trowbridge observed, “This voyage possesses an interest which can merely be hinted at in description. . . The mind goes back to the time when Captain John Smith, with the expedition of 1607, sailed up the stream. . . but you are diverted from

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<sup>102</sup> Goldberger, 89.

<sup>103</sup> A. H. Ackley, Supt. To Depot Officer, General Supply Depot, Wash. D.C., June 18, 1920. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery. Ackley, as well as others at various times in the cemetery’s history, reported to Washington that disturbing the Revolutionary monument would likely evoke conflict with Uniontown residents, as they used it to mark their cemetery and the land upon which it stood belonged to an African American family.

<sup>104</sup> Bradley M. McDonald, Kenneth E. Struck, and Kathleen J. Bragdon, “Cast Down Your Bucket Where You Are”: An ethnohistorical study of the African-American community on the lands of the Yorktown Naval Weapons Station, 1865-1918. Atlantic Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Norfolk, Virginia, 1992.

those recollections by the landmarks of recent famous events.”<sup>105</sup> Of Hampton, Virginia Trowbridge observed, “I found it a thrift village, occupied chiefly of freedmen. The former aristocratic residences had been replaced by negro huts.”<sup>106</sup> Here early history met forcefully with the new realities of the Civil War’s changes, as freedpeople now dominated the Revolutionary landscape.

Whitelaw Reid repeated this theme of history’s intersections, writing of Norfolk, Virginia, “Everywhere were negroes – on the sidewalks – driving the wagons – in the huts that lined the road.”<sup>107</sup> All around Reid noted the ways in which the resources of founding families had been appropriated by the freedmen. “Bricks, two centuries old, imported by the early colonists from Great Britain. . . were built up into little outside chimneys for these cabins of the Freedmen,” Reid lamented, “and here and there one noticed an antique Elizabethan chair, of like age and origin, converted to the uses of a portly negress.”<sup>108</sup> Whatever the historical accuracy or inaccuracy of Reid’s assessment of the bricks in question, his imagination had made the connection that the landscape prompted, merging Colonial America with the legacy of emancipation in a tangible way.

These two historical moments appeared again at the 1881 Yorktown Centennial celebration, when thousands of visitors flocked to the tiny Virginia town to commemorate the United States’ founding. In a description reminiscent of Blue and Gray reunions, Sarah Goldberger explains that Civil War veterans served in camps of

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<sup>105</sup> J.T. Trowbridge, *The Devastated South, 1865-1866: A Picture of the Battlefields and of the Devastated Confederacy*, (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1956).

<sup>106</sup> Trowbridge, 220.

<sup>107</sup> Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Tour of the Southern States, May 1, 1865 to May 1, 1866*, (New York: Moore, Wiltach & Baldwin, 1866).

<sup>108</sup> Reid, 14. This comment becomes all the more intriguing if one considers that slaves likely made the bricks for those aristocratic homes.

Revolutionary War reenactors, merging their real and imagined service.<sup>109</sup> With the passing of the Centennial moment, memorial events appear to have shifted exclusively to the African American community. The two wars remained linked, however, after the Centennial passed, as care for the Yorktown Victory Monument, dedicated during the 1881 tribute, fell to the National Cemetery superintendent. Though the Victory Monument was located about a half mile from the National Cemetery, those who came to see it after 1881 would have had to go first to the superintendent's quarters for information.<sup>110</sup>

This simple fact of geography is easy to overlook, but when the implications of this landscape are considered, it reveals important information. Upon arriving at the National Cemetery, positioned along the main road into Yorktown, observers would have seen the brick cemetery, labeled with the American flag. Just beyond its walls they would have noticed additional rows of graves, and across the street Uniontown's Shiloh Baptist Church. Those who had visited other battlefields and learned to recognize defensive works likely would have noted earthworks just beyond the cemetery as well, dating first from the Revolution and then fortified in the Civil War. One wonders if they would have been similarly struck, as Trowbridge and Reid were in the 1860s, by the confluence of United States history on display. Certainly there was no overlooking what the Revolution and Civil War had wrought, for before they could approach the superintendent for directions to the Victory Monument or to seek information about a

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<sup>109</sup> For a longer discussion of the 1881 Centennial, see Goldberger, *Repatriating Yorktown*.

<sup>110</sup> Various superintendents' reports attest to the location of the Victory Monument and what care of the monument entailed, including maintenance of the lawn, construction of a fence around it, and monitoring visitor activity. Quarterly Reports, Records of Yorktown National Cemetery.

loved one buried in the cemetery, they had to first encounter the visual testimony to black freedom.<sup>111</sup>

If visitors had come through Yorktown during Memorial Day, they would have also witnessed services dominated by the African American community. On May 30, 1916, Superintendent Johann F. Vaudre wrote to the Quartermaster Office in Washington, D.C., “Decoration Day at the Cemetery Yorktown Va passed off very quiet and orderly good many colored people visited the Cemetery during the day each grave received the usual small flag.”<sup>112</sup> Just below that entry, Vaudre penned a second letter, dated the same, “Decoration held at the Yorktown Va National Cemetery. . . the day was observed in accordance with NCR (par 15).”<sup>113</sup> Why Vaudre chose to write two notes, and whether he sent both or only the second, is unknown. However, taken together, the two messages provide important information not just about the events, but the ways in which the African American community conformed to expected patterns of memorialization.<sup>114</sup>

Vaudre’s first note suggested that this event in 1916 was not exceptional, but rather part of an established pattern undertaken by the community. Moreover, his use of the term, “each grave” seems to indicate that the “colored people” took it upon

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<sup>111</sup> Various reports from National Cemetery superintendents, as well as later documentation of tour stops at the cemetery provide glimpses of these various aspects. For more information see, Quarterly Reports, Records of Yorktown National Cemetery and Flickinger Papers.

<sup>112</sup> Johann F. Vaudre to Q.M. U.S. Army, Washington, D.C. May 30, 1916. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery.

<sup>113</sup> Johann F. Vaudre to Q.M. U.S. Army, Washington, D.C. May 30, 1916. (2) Records of Yorktown National Cemetery.

<sup>114</sup> African Americans’ participation in Decoration and Memorial Day events was not unique to Yorktown, but part of a long legacy of black celebrations dating from the end of the Civil War. For more information on events elsewhere, see Blight, 64-97. See also, William Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

themselves to honor all of the fallen in the cemetery. His second letter, and its emphasis on protocol rather than detail, illustrates that African American celebrants knew the accepted standards of Decoration Day procedure and were careful to conform to them – both ensuring their continued participation in the event but more importantly their awareness of the “proper” ways to celebrate citizenship and honor the nation. In performing these events according to accepted practice, the black community reinforced their identities as equal and capable citizens at a time when those identities were constantly under assault.<sup>115</sup>

Though superintendents’ letters do not systematically report on Memorial Day events, on May 31, 1919, A. H. Ackley again described the ceremonies at the cemetery. Ackley assured his supervisors in Washington that he had prepared the cemetery “in the best possible conditions” and that the day was “clear and bright.” However, despite these favorable conditions, “the white folks had no service.” Rather, “the colored folks Had a service at their church across the way from Cemetery.” This was Ackley’s first experience of Memorial Day at Yorktown, as he was a new arrival, perhaps explaining why he felt it necessary to note the white residents’ lack of services as it was not an occurrence with which he was familiar. Of the progression from Shiloh Baptist though, Ackley noted, “they formed a parade and marched from church to the N.E. section where the colored soldiers are interred and held a service there which was very impressive and harmonious.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> See Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1998) for a study of the difficulties African American communities in the South faced during this time period and the ways they chose to conform to and combat racial expectations.

<sup>116</sup> A.H. Ackley, Superintendent, to Q.M. General, U.S.A., May 31, 1919. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery.

Lucy Hudgins O'Hara, a local white resident of Yorktown, remembered this custom in her memoir of life in Yorktown before the coming of the National Park. In her chapter on "Colored Customs," O'Hara described a "big celebration" that was held by "all the colored people from near and far." According to O'Hara, this event on May 30, was called "Emancipation Day," and the black community celebrated "the ending of the institution of slavery."<sup>117</sup> Whether O'Hara's labeling of the event "Emancipation Day" was a matter of her misremembering its significance or not, it suggests that the tone of these festivities gave the impression that participants celebrated the ending of slavery, along with the triumph of the Union. O'Hara echoed the sentiment that the day's events were always "orderly," and noted that "after the parade and ceremonies were over on Main Street, the participants would go on to their own cemetery back of the U.S. National Cemetery. There they would hold a memorial service and lay flowers on the graves."<sup>118</sup> In her description of the event and use of terms like "their own," O'Hara implicitly separated these events from white public activity, as if the history her black neighbors celebrated was somehow distinct from her own.

Beyond annual celebrations, African Americans also performed day to day labor and care in the National Cemetery. Though superintendents were typically white, they appear to have employed black members of the community almost exclusively. Godfrey Harrod worked in the cemetery for more than a decade, receiving praise from multiple

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<sup>117</sup> Lucy Hudgins O'Hara, *Yorktown, as I Remember*, (Verona, VA: McClure Printing Company, 1981).

<sup>118</sup> O'Hara, 30. O'Hara's use of the phrase "back of" leaves some question of whether she meant in the back of the National Cemetery or the Shiloh Baptist cemetery behind the National Cemetery. However, given that Superintendent Ackley specified the "colored" section was in the "N.E. corner," it is likely that O'Hara meant the back of the National Cemetery, as the northeast corner is opposite the entrance of the cemetery and could thus be identified as in the "back" of it.

superintendents in their reports to Washington. In June of 1918, Superintendent Richard B. Hill reported that Harrod had informed him that due to the high cost of living in Yorktown, he could no longer work for the low wage of \$1.50 per day. More than one superintendent had also alerted Washington to the high cost of living in Yorktown, and Hill was sympathetic to Harrod's plight. He explained, "I find that laborers wages here and in vicinity range from \$2.75 to \$3.50 per diem," and advocated that Harrod's pay be increased because, "it would be unfortunate to loose [sic] him. . . as I am impressed."<sup>119</sup>

This moment is noteworthy for two reasons. The first, of course, is that Harrod was well respected enough by Hill and others that Hill was willing to advocate on his behalf. Second, the stark difference between the pay Harrod was accepting at \$1.50, and the bottom end of the pay scale Hill reported at \$2.75, suggests that Harrod may have been taking below-market wages at the cemetery for some time. Moreover, it further implies that Harrod remained at the cemetery for reasons other than pay and that perhaps he gained a sense of participation in the work of the nation, or a responsibility towards fallen veterans, that compelled him to labor for little income.<sup>120</sup>

Harrod's presence at the National Cemetery also provided a continuity in leadership and institutional memory that Yorktown otherwise lacked. Following the death of Superintendent Vaudre in December of 1917, at least four different people passed through the position in the next ten years.<sup>121</sup> In their letters back to Washington,

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<sup>119</sup> Richard B. Hill, Superintendent to Dept Quartermaster, Washington, D.C., June 8, 1918. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery.

<sup>120</sup> While it is also possible to conclude that Harrod could not find work elsewhere, this does not seem to be the case. Superintendents' reports are full of complaints of the scarcity of labor in Yorktown and overabundance of work, suggesting that for reliable hands like Harrod's work was easy to find.

<sup>121</sup> Quarterly Reports of the Superintendent, Yorktown National Cemetery. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery.

superintendents noted the role that Harrod filled by mentioning that he provided information they needed about the history of the site, and served as acting superintendent when a new appointee had not yet arrived or a present leader had to be away. On July 1, 1921 Superintendent Ackley reported, “The cemetery will be left in charge of Godfrey Harrod. A capable and trustworthy man pending the arrival of another superintendent.”<sup>122</sup> It is clear that Harrod was more than simply a laborer in the cemetery and his appointment at various times to acting superintendent indicates that he held an unusual position of authority at Yorktown. This tradition of leaving African American laborers in charge of the cemetery continued after Harrod, as his successor, William H. Marshall, also served as acting superintendent at various points in time.<sup>123</sup>

Instances of commemorative events held by local African American residents, as well as the central role black individuals occupied in the day to day operations of the National Cemetery indicate that at Yorktown the reconciliationist memory of the Civil War did not triumph. Rather, members of the community were active both in memory construction and in its maintenance. Moreover, visitation increased after the turn of the century, ensuring there was more work to be done for the Superintendent and caretakers but also that more people would be exposed to the legacy of black freedom Yorktown had to offer.

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<sup>122</sup> A. H. Ackley to Quartermaster Supply Officer, Washington, D.C., July 1, 1921. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery.

<sup>123</sup> Francis Jones, Supt to Q.M. Supply Office, Washington, D.C. July 17, 1927. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery. Jones indicated that Marshall had already been laboring in the cemetery for five years before his appointment into Harrod’s full-time position. Records indicate that Marshall served as a primary point of contact, corresponding with Washington directly. Interestingly, Marshall’s son, William G. Marshall, served as an assistant pastor at Shiloh Baptist Church during the period of its removal from across the street from the National Cemetery. 1930 United States Census, Nelson District, York County; pg 226. Ancestry.com. “In Loving Memory of Rev. William G. Marshall, Sr.” Records of Colonial National Historical Park.

In April of 1920, Superintendent Ackley wrote Washington complaining of the problems that beset Yorktown in meeting visitor needs and protecting the integrity of the memorial space. Ackley was particularly perturbed by the tendency of visitors to climb the Victory Monument in order to take pictures, and the fact that he could not be at the monument and in the cemetery at once. According to Ackley, “the cemetery requires all of my time to answer questions and keep people from climbing the wall and the children from injuring the shrubry [sic].”<sup>124</sup> Days later, Ackley wrote Washington again, this time under the subject heading, “disorderly conduct of visitors,” perhaps hoping that title would illicit a more prompt response. He requested a guard from the nearby Naval Mine Depot, and suggested that with the help of a guard he and his employee, Godfrey Harrod, could maintain proper decorum at both the Victory Monument and the National Cemetery. To further prove the pressing nature of his request, Ackley explained, “visitors to the cemetery and Peace monument during the month of April will amount to over 500 and the number will increase next month.”<sup>125</sup> Ackley’s complaints evidence two important elements of visitation at the time. First, they reveal that a number of visitors made their way to Yorktown before the National Park Service stepped in to interpret it. Second, they illustrate the ways in which the black community took responsibility for care of the Revolutionary memory, as Harrod helped ensure decorum at the Victory Monument.

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<sup>124</sup> A.H. Ackley, Superintendent to Zone Supply Officer, Washington, D.C., April 14, 1920. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery.

<sup>125</sup> A.H. Ackley, Supt, to Zone Supply Officer, Washington, D.C., April 25, 1920. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery.

By 1931, National Cemetery superintendents and laborers no longer had to worry about being in two places at once. Presidential Proclamation Number 1929 took effect on December 30, 1930, establishing Colonial National Monument composed of portions of Yorktown, including the monument, and Jamestown.<sup>126</sup> This new park would tell the story from colonial Virginia to independence, “creating on the Peninsula of Virginia a great historical park.”<sup>127</sup> According to National Park Service historian E.M. Riley, “little had been done” in terms of preservation at Yorktown prior to the park’s establishment in 1931.<sup>128</sup>

In his 1936 report, Riley explained that park founders intended to install at Yorktown interpretation that would make “understanding. . .easy for all.”<sup>129</sup> To achieve this, historians had decided to focus on a single date, despite their awareness that “the history of the land goes back to 1631.”<sup>130</sup> Predictably the date they chose was October, 19, 1781, the day of Cornwallis’ surrender to Washington. In Park Service historians’ estimation this day was “the most important single date in Yorktown’s history.”<sup>131</sup> This mentality of privileging the Revolutionary moment, even a single day within a longer siege, laid the foundation for a tension that would plague Yorktown historians in subsequent years. To ensure focus on one date, Park Service administrators determined that they needed to eliminate visual intrusions of other historical events on the landscape.

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<sup>126</sup> E.M. Riley, *History of the Development of Colonial National Monument*, (United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1936). Park legislation was amended on August 22, 1933 to further solidify boundaries including portions of Jamestown, Yorktown, and Williamsburg.

<sup>127</sup> Riley, 2.

<sup>128</sup> Riley, 7.

<sup>129</sup> Riley, 8.

<sup>130</sup> Riley, 8. This observation, of course, belies more than a desire to focus exclusively on the Revolution but further a privileging of Anglo-American history over Native American use of the land that pre-dated 1631.

<sup>131</sup> Riley, 8.

In this aspect, Yorktown's history suggests that reconciliation was part of a larger process that sought to construct a historical narrative of the United States that presented a unified and uncontested image of the nation's past.

Despite their triumphal founding, park employees initially had trouble finding community support and interest in the Yorktown project. Hoping to establish a guide service for the public in August of 1931, historians planned to meet visitors in Yorktown and lead them on "automobile caravan[s]" through the various stops they deemed most important.<sup>132</sup> Following instructions from his superiors, park historian Floyd Flickinger planned such a caravan for the end of August, intending to present a "five-minute talk on the mission of the monument and a general account of the events leading up to Yorktown."<sup>133</sup> This instruction demonstrated the administration's hope that they could not only start leading tours, but also foster a better understanding within the community about the purpose and goals of the park – that is, an understanding of the true historical significance of Yorktown. Unfortunately for Flickinger, he reported on August 30, after standing in the parking lot two afternoons waiting for visitors, that he was like a "bride deserted at the altar." He wrote his supervisor, "I regret that our initial efforts with guide service did not meet with success," and indicated that though many cars had driven past him on their way to the Yorktown waterfront or elsewhere, no one had stopped for a historical tour.<sup>134</sup> Having spoken with people around the Peninsula, Flickinger concluded that the park needed to take its mission beyond its own boundaries, reaching out to the

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<sup>132</sup> William M. Robinson to Mr. B.F. Flickinger, August 15, 1931. Flickinger Papers.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> B. Floyd Flickinger to Mr. Wm. M. Robinson, Jr., August 30, 1931. Flickinger Papers.

community to “enlighten the people here in the East where the National Park Service is not as well known as in the West.”<sup>135</sup> To this end, park employees began producing promotional materials to distribute throughout the area.<sup>136</sup>

In addition to their tour efforts, park historians also attempted to collect the necessary artifacts and books they felt would make their new National Park a fitting public resource. Early museum displays featured an eclectic assembly of interpretive material, combining artifacts apparently dating from the Revolution, including a chair “stated to have been in the house at the time of surrender,” and more recent objects such as “dress uniforms from the Sesquicentennial.”<sup>137</sup> Yet the museum displays also bound Colonial National Monument tangibly to the broader network of National Parks in creation across the United States. Within their small viewing area, historians installed fossils from places such as Mesa Verde and Sequoia National Parks, and photographs from Grand Canyon and Grand Teton National Parks.<sup>138</sup>

This choice to include artifacts unrelated to the Yorktown story reflected an interpretive trend in the park’s early years that sought to educate visitors about this national landscape of park creation and the inherent assumption of America’s greatness as demonstrated by its vast and various resources. Park administrators made sure to keep

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> For examples of early park promotional materials see “Bulletin Number 1. Announcement of Guide Service. September 18, 1931. Flickinger Papers.

<sup>137</sup> Memorandum for Superintendent Robinson, Jan 7, 1933 Re: Museum Activities, 1932. Flickinger Papers. Park employees hoped to acquire books as well as artifacts, but limited their efforts to materials relating to the 1781 siege as “this class of material [was] of first importance” given that the siege was their “most capital story.” This seemingly straightforward statement had larger implications for the development of the park as a historical resource, in that by privileging what they acquired and kept, park historians limited what resources would be available for research about their site in the future. In a sense, they were inadvertently erasing parts of the historical record simply by choosing not to learn about it or create avenues of research for it.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. Somewhat ironically, Sequoia National Park had its own tie to the Civil War era, in that it was home to the General Grant and General Sherman trees, and had previously been named General Grant National Park.

a stock of informational brochures about other National Parks and Monuments on hand at the visitor center, and early outreach efforts often included talks about Yorktown as well as a survey of western parks.<sup>139</sup> However, as Yorktown's place in this burgeoning historical landscape took stronger root, members of the museum community questioned the intrusion of other parks on Yorktown's singular narrative. Floyd Flickinger reported in June of 1932 that members of the American Association of Museums were "not in favor of an exhibit of objects from other National Parks and Monuments," because they were "foreign notes in our Colonial atmosphere."<sup>140</sup> Flickinger agreed with these criticisms, and felt the park should take their advice to better present a "unified idea and impression" to park visitors.<sup>141</sup>

Efforts to connect the park to a larger National Park network without including the "foreign notes" of natural parks like Grand Canyon became easier as the number of historical parks in Virginia grew. In framing Yorktown as part of a larger narrative landscape in Virginia, historians could still tie their work to the nation and the Park Service. From the outset, it was clear that planners hoped visitors would travel to more than just Colonial National Historical Park, and would spend time taking in the holistic history lesson Virginia offered. In response to a letter from Virginia Hosts Incorporated offering their services to make Yorktown "occupy a place in the National mind comparable with its place in American history" and hoping to "cooperate with all parks of the State in making Virginia the greatest place for tourists in the country," Flickinger

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<sup>139</sup> William M. Robinson, Jr. to Director National Park Service, June 20, 1932. Flickinger Papers.

<sup>140</sup> Memorandum for Superintendent Robinson, June 22, 1932. Flickinger Papers.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

supported the private company's work.<sup>142</sup> Forwarding their offer to his superiors he noted, "it will be good for us to capitalize now, and tie in with the other parks, so that the tourists will be rooted [sic] here from other parks."<sup>143</sup>

Director of the National Park Service Arno Cammerer involved himself in this ongoing discussion of where Yorktown fit in the larger landscape. Writing to Flickinger he noted, "the thought occurs to me that through such an organization [of parks] it may be possible to formulate a plan by which groups of tourists such as the groups of school children brought through the area by the Peninsula and similar bus lines may be given informational literature for the entire area from Jamestown to Yorktown in the form of a unified and connected story."<sup>144</sup> This philosophy of using individual park units to fashion a "unified and connected story" extended beyond the Peninsula to include all of Virginia.

In a speech that appears to have been written for a presentation at Richmond National Battlefield, Flickinger clearly articulated this vision writing, "We are proud of our Virginia areas. . . We want everyone to understand and appreciate. . . the intrinsic importance from the standpoint of conservation and the consequences to the Nation of the saving and the education use of these wonderlands of America."<sup>145</sup> He went on to describe the process by which the Park Service selected sites, explaining that units, "in their individual ways. . . portray stirring and fundamental events."<sup>146</sup> Taken collectively the parks represented a "more or less complete narrative and from them we can watch

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<sup>142</sup> John C. Temple, Virginia Hosts Incorporated, to B. Floyd Flickinger, September 19, 1933. Flickinger Papers.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Arno B. Cammerer to B. Floyd Flickinger, November 11, 1933. Flickinger Papers.

<sup>145</sup> Floyd B. Flickinger, untitled document, "Guidebooks and Presentations," Flickinger Papers.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

American history go by.”<sup>147</sup> Flickinger also articulated the vision of United States history the Park Service sought to emulate through parks. The National Park Service was concerned with “the development of the Nation of the progressive unfolding of history,” and intended for visitors to meet that narrative through “contact with the physical sites where history has occurred.”<sup>148</sup> This statement, limited as it was by conceptions of “progressive” history and a seemingly linear “unfolding” of national significance and identity over the previous two hundred years, suggested that alternative narratives were unwelcome within these “physical sites where history occurred.” Though he did not articulate this fact, its implications would become strikingly evident as development continued at Yorktown. Only some of the history that had occurred at Yorktown was welcome in this park, and to ensure uniformity, disruptions would need to be eliminated.

Moreover, as this structure became more defined, parks in Virginia became increasingly distinguishable by their perceived place within military histories of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, further narrowing the scope of interpretation at Yorktown. In a 1936 memorandum, N.P.S. officials asserted that “development of certain of our Southern Military areas [had] clearly indicated the need for a more effective organization in order to obtain maximum results from these areas and their related stories.”<sup>149</sup> Within

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Memorandum for the Director, Proposal for the organization of certain Revolutionary and Civil War areas, Feb 24, 1936. Flickinger Papers. Other records indicate that by 1934, administration was shared across parks based on geographic proximity. Floyd Flickinger, then superintendent of Colonial National Monument, also oversaw Appomattox Court House, Petersburg, Yorktown National Cemetery, and Poplar Grove National Cemetery, park of Petersburg National Battlefield. This has two important implications. First, superintendents had authority over sites that covered broad swaths of history rather than a particular time period. Second, in conceptualizing interpretation at their individual parks, they almost certainly had the luxury of excluding information they felt could be incorporated at other parks. For example, Flickinger, while understanding the significance of the Civil War, could rest assured its story would still be told at Petersburg and Appomattox, and could be excluded from Yorktown. “List of National Parks,” November 1, 1934. Flickinger Papers.

this framework, the “historical program” would not be concerned with only the “story of each individual area” but would rather seek to “give each area its proper place in a much bigger pattern which comprehends the story of a whole campaign or series of campaigns.”<sup>150</sup> Beyond the limits already imposed by the decision to prioritize a single day in history at Yorktown, this conceptualization of each park fulfilling a utilitarian role within a comprehensive story further narrowed the interpretive agenda.

Park historians identified this as “the Yorktown problem” and observed that though there were two stories of two sieges – 1781 and 1862 – available at their site, they needed to “more definitely tie up [their] story with the stories of other parks and monuments.”<sup>151</sup> This idea had concrete consequences for the construction of the landscape that visitors would encounter at this “site where history has occurred.” Perhaps most significantly, park administrators decided against marking Civil War sites at Yorktown. Historical Technician, Clarke Venable, presumably from the Washington, D.C. office of the National Park Service, reported to the national Chief Historian, Verne Chatelain with regards to the “Civil War problem on the Yorktown field,” that he felt it would be a “mistake [to] attempt any detailed marking program.”<sup>152</sup> In Venable’s estimation, “to the average visitor Yorktown is a colonial and revolutionary field,” and to ask them to jump temporally from one century to another would be to “ask a mental transition too swift and too sharp.”<sup>153</sup> Moreover, the National Park Service did not need

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<sup>150</sup> Memorandum for the Director, Proposal for the organization of certain Revolutionary War and Civil War areas, Feb 24, 1936. Flickinger Papers.

<sup>151</sup> Elbert Cox, Assistant Park Historian to M.E. Gardner, Historical Assistant, April 2, 1934. Flickinger Papers.

<sup>152</sup> Clarke Venable, Historical Technician to Verne E. Chatelain, Chief Historian, National Park Service, June 4, 1934. Flickinger Papers.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

another site interpreting the Civil War because they already had “excellent examples of the Civil War fields, infinitely more significant than the Yorktown field.”<sup>154</sup> Venable apparently felt strongly about this point, as he continued forcefully, “If we impose the Civil War picture on the Yorktown field we accomplish nothing by way of example, little by way of education, and we destroy Yorktown as a pure Colonial field – in which it stands alone.”<sup>155</sup> Other historians agreed with Venable and wrote memorandums to Floyd Flickinger in support. Historical technician Joseph C. Robert concurred, explaining “it would be a mistake to attempt a detailed marking program in presenting the Civil War Story at Colonial National Monument.”<sup>156</sup> In Robert’s estimation, “to exaggerate the Civil War at Yorktown” by marking it, “would be to confuse the visitor and distort the truth.”<sup>157</sup>

Focusing interpretive efforts meant more than deciding which history to place on park signs. For park administrators, it also meant unifying the visual impression that would greet visitors as they toured the site. As E.M. Riley described in his history of the project, “much must depend on the visitor’s imagination; the extent and size of the operations must be visualized through the stimulus provided by museums and

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid. With the statement Venable referenced then-existent Civil War sites in Virginia at places like Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, which included the Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House battlefields, as well as Petersburg and Richmond. An important distinction which Venable did not make was that all of these sites were contested during the war, unlike Yorktown which remained under Union occupation from 1862 forward. As a consequence, none of these sites developed freedmen’s communities like those on the Peninsula, and as such lacked tangible resources to those stories. By limiting stories based on perceived significance, park administrators also limited what avenues of interpretation would be available in the future.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Joseph C. Robert, Historical Technician to Mr. Flickinger, June 9, 1934 IN RE: Mr. Venable’s June 4 Report to Mr. Chatelain (The Civil War Story at Colonial National Monument.) Flickinger Papers.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. See also, Malcom Gardner, Historical Technician to Mr. Flickinger Re: Mr. Venable’s June 4 Report to Mr. Chatelain (The Problem of the Civil War Story at Yorktown), June 9, 1934. Flickinger Papers.

reproductions.”<sup>158</sup> This meant “restoring enough portions of the battlefields” for visitors to get the proper impression of the “events that transpired here in 1781.”<sup>159</sup> Further, though Riley used the term “development” rather than “demolition,” the latter would have been an equally appropriate description. Where intrusions could not be torn down, park architects hoped to obscure them from view. Edward Zimmer, Assistant Landscape Architect at Yorktown wrote Flickinger of one such instance where he hoped to conceal private residences. He explained, “I call your attention to the exposed back yards of the colored houses along Church Street. . . the exposing of these yards in their general unkept condition and laundry flying in the breeze would be more offensive than the neatly painted garages.”<sup>160</sup> Though Zimmer used the “unkept condition” of the yards as a reason to deem them “offensive,” many reports and planning documents indicated that elimination and screening of post-1781 buildings and resources, like artifacts from Mesa Verde in the museum, would disrupt the unified vision historians hoped to construct.<sup>161</sup>

While they often did not mention it specifically, language about visual intrusions and unity at the park certainly referenced the National Cemetery and Uniontown community. Both were prominent features of the landscape, and neither fit the vision of 1781. A park report written in 1940 did mention Uniontown specifically, and put the

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<sup>158</sup> Riley, 18. To see an example of an early driving tour map of Yorktown National Battlefield, see Appendix, page 29, image 2.

<sup>159</sup> Riley, 18.

<sup>160</sup> Edward S. Zimmer, Assistant Landscape Architect to B. Floyd Flickinger, April 20, 1934. Flickinger Papers. It is unclear what Zimmer meant in his use of the term “colored,” whether he meant it literally as in multi-colored paint or was using the term to identify the houses as owned by African Americans. Given available early maps, Church Street did not border Uniontown, but the African American community in Yorktown was also not confined within those borders.

<sup>161</sup> This mentality becomes particularly clear in planning documents related to the Colonial National Parkway in which administrators planned to present motorists with what they thought looked like a colonial road, going so far as to obscure modern development with trees, that was still navigable by modern motor vehicles.

issue most bluntly, stating, “to properly prepare this area for visitors. . . it would be necessary to demolish the entire Negro colony. This, of course, would be desirable.”<sup>162</sup>

As Sarah Goldberger has pointed out, the National Park Service achieved this aspect of visual unification in the 1970s when they removed the last inhabitants of Uniontown. However, in another sense, they never achieved a unified vision, because the National Cemetery and Shiloh Church cemetery remain. Moreover, both cemeteries testify to the post-Civil War history of race, emancipation, and Reconstruction in the United States.

Though many of the documents and correspondences described above fail to mention it, the cultural landscape established by the African American community in around Yorktown in the decades prior to the establishment of the park are worth examining in closer detail, because the National Park Service inherited a unique memorial space that they could not eliminate. Yorktown National Cemetery officially closed for new internments in 1919, but in the two decades before it closed, of the sixteen soldier burials, twelve were veterans of the United States Colored Troops – a full seventy five percent of soldier burials.<sup>163</sup> This appears to have been an unusual occurrence, as Superintendent Randolph Anderson reported in January of 1932 that while there was no section of the cemetery set aside for “burial of decendents [sic] from adjacent Military Posts,” there were “a number of Colored Troopers” buried between the years 1900 and 1917 who “might have been stationed at a Post near here.”<sup>164</sup> Anderson went on to mention that this was just speculation, as records at the cemetery did not indicate where

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<sup>162</sup> Quoted in Goldberger, 244.

<sup>163</sup> Randolph Anderson, Superintendent to A.D. Hughes, Captain, QMC, October 20, 1931. Records of Yorktown National.

<sup>164</sup> Randolph Anderson, Superintendent to Fred W. Davis, Captain, QMC Assistant, Baltimore, MD, January 9, 1932. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery.

or when these soldiers had served. An examination of individual veterans' service records reveals that they had served during the Civil War and had been discharged in 1865 or shortly thereafter.<sup>165</sup> Thus, Anderson's explanation for the inordinate amount of African American soldiers in his cemetery does not suffice.

This question of why so many soldiers or their families chose to be buried at Yorktown is all the more intriguing when one considers that after 1900, the cemetery had run out of space for new burials. As a result, all of the soldiers, including white veterans, interred at Yorktown between 1900 and 1919 were buried in graves with unknown soldiers.<sup>166</sup> Presumably this information was available when making the decision of where to be buried, and for those intent on choosing a final resting place in a National Cemetery on the Peninsula, Hampton National Cemetery, which was much larger, was also an option.<sup>167</sup> The decision to be buried or bury a loved one in a National Cemetery carried an important symbolic meaning, as it placed the deceased in the realm not only of citizen, but of soldier, an identity that was especially meaningful for former slaves who had used their service to advocate for equal rights. Moreover, as historian Marita Sturken points out, "participation in sites of memory [like National Cemeteries and historic sites]

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<sup>165</sup> Civil War Service records, Andrew Brooken, 23 U.S.C. Inf., Company H; Daniel Johnson, 2 U.S.C. Cav., Company D; Peter Price, 2 U.S.C. Inf., Company A; Thomas J. Brooks, 2 U.S.C. Inf., Company C; George Gordon, U.S.C. Inf., Company G; Hobdy Iverson, 2 U.S.C. Cav., Company D; Samuel Washington, 1 U.S.C. Cav., Company K; Moses Colstor, 2 U.S.C. Cav., Company B; Joseph E. Turner, 41 U.S.C. Inf., Company B; Bell Wilson, U.S.S. *Minnesota*. Ancestry.com. Eight of the twelve U.S.C.T. veterans' service records could be located. Where information about enlistment was available, these records also show that many of these soldiers had enlisted at or near Fort Monroe, including Sargent Samuel Washington, Company K First U.S. Colored Cavalry, who was inaccurately listed as belonging to an infantry unit.

<sup>166</sup> Randolph Anderson, Superintendent to A.D. Hughes, Captain, QMC, October 20, 1931. Records of Yorktown National Cemetery. This letter provides a table of all burials after 1900, and includes in each entry the number of unknown soldiers interred in the corresponding graves. Quarterly reports of the cemetery superintendents during those years also indicate this was the case.

<sup>167</sup> "Hampton National Cemetery Historical Information," <https://www.cem.va.gov/cem/cems/nchp/hampton.asp>. Accessed April 16, 2017. Hampton National Cemetery also dates from the Civil War, but expansion efforts ensured that it was open to new internments for decades after Yorktown closed.

involves the perception of the nation as an audience.”<sup>168</sup> It is necessary then to recognize these burials not only as peculiar instances, but as explicit messages of citizenship and belonging to a nation that was at best ambivalent towards and at worst outright hostile to African Americans.

Sturken further argues that “cultural memory is produced through objects, images, and representations.”<sup>169</sup> Even bodies themselves can serve as “technologies of memory in that they embody and generate memory and are thus implicated in the power dynamics of memory’s production.”<sup>170</sup> Though Sturken is concerned primarily with animate bodies, her argument can also be translated to soldier burials at Yorktown. Tombstones testified to soldiers’ service, listing their unit and rank – classifying them as integral parts of the nation. Continued interaction of the community with the soldier dead helped produce cultural memory that stood at odds with the story National Park historians hoped to tell. Even after the National Cemetery closed for new internments, the first veteran, Theodore Robinson, was buried outside of its walls in the Shiloh Baptist area. Theodore Robinson, Mess Attendant on the U.S.S. *Leonidas* died on September 7, 1920. Records do not indicate who made the decision of where to bury Robinson, but given that his death was accidental, it seems likely that a family member chose to bury him there rather than at Hampton or another National Cemetery. To date, headstones outside the cemetery indicate that another eighteen veterans followed, the most recent in 2011.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), 14.

<sup>169</sup> Sturken, 9.

<sup>170</sup> Sturken, 10.

<sup>171</sup> A report dated 7 September 1920 confirms Robinson’s death. Civil War Service Records, Ancestry.com. The count of later veteran internment is based on a survey of the headstones outside the cemetery that indicate

Enduring use and interaction with this site by the African American community has an impact on its cultural memory and meaning. According to sociologists Robin Wagner-Pacific and Barry Schwartz, “Whatever processes brought [a] cultural object into being in the first place, it is the use made of it that brings it into the life of the society.”<sup>172</sup> Historian Gregg Mitman puts it differently, explaining, “Place is not simply a location, but a landscape that is produced and acquires meaning through social interaction.”<sup>173</sup> Both of these assertions suggest that meaning is not simply inscribed upon a place, or a National Park, strictly by the intentions of administrators. In the case of Yorktown, writing the history of the Civil War out of the narrative, and attempting to erase it from the physical landscape, was not sufficient to establish a singular meaning.

In this conceptualization of memory-making then, it becomes important to understand both the intentions of park creators, and the limitations of their influence. Yorktown National Cemetery became a site of narrative conflict, a place where the legacies of the Civil War and emancipation could not be expunged. Moreover, it became a site of engagement for the African American community where they could continue to assert their significant role in the country’s history, and a location where the public would undoubtedly encounter that memory. In December of 1931, Superintendent Anderson reported that ten thousand visitors had “called at the Cemetery” during the

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service. Even those who do not choose to be buried in a National Cemetery can be issued military headstones which are standardized and easily identifiable.

<sup>172</sup> Robin Wagner-Pacific and Barry Schwartz, “The Vietnam Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 97, September 1991: 416.

<sup>173</sup> Gregg Mitman, “Hay Fever Holiday: Health, Leisure, and Place in Gilded-Age America,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 77, Fall 2003: 604.

Sesquicentennial, and thus even as they came for the Revolutionary memory, they also met something else.<sup>174</sup>

Though the Park Service would eventually triumph in the removal of the Uniontown community, they could not remove the National Cemetery. Moreover, even with the relocation of the Shiloh Baptist Church, its cemetery remains, forming a tangible link between the present and the post-war community who started burying their dead in the shadow of Union protection in the 1860s. Consequently, just as the National Park Service inherited these memorial spaces, so too the American public inherits National Parks. These are places that, according to the Park Service's mission statement, preserve "natural and cultural resources and values. . . for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations."<sup>175</sup> They are places that seek to teach people what it has meant, and what it continues to mean, to be an American. This is a weighty goal, and it is necessary to continue to evaluate parks' histories to ask what might be added, subtracted, or simply recognized to generate a more robust and comprehensive understanding of our collective past.

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<sup>174</sup> Randolph Anderson to Finance Officer, Third Corps Area, Baltimore, Maryland, December 1, 1931. Records of the Yorktown National Cemetery.

<sup>175</sup> Mission Statement, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm>.

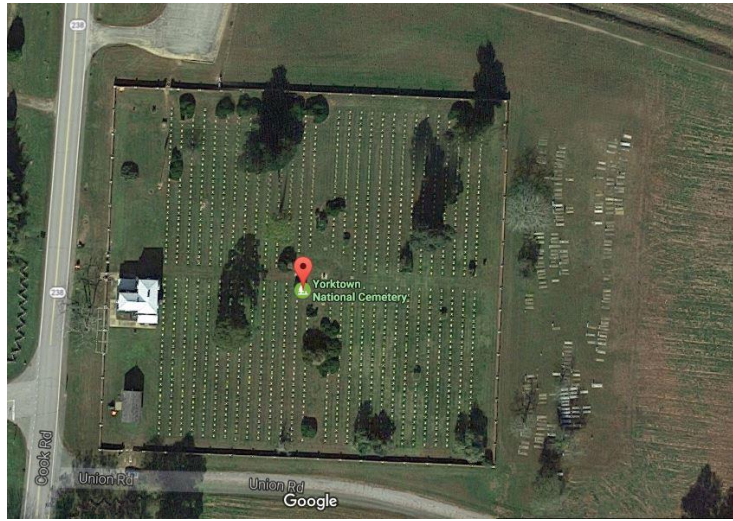
## Appendix

### Image 1:

*Aerial view of the Yorktown National Cemetery and Shiloh Baptist Cemetery.*

Google Earth.

On the right hand side of the picture, outside of the brick walls of the cemetery, graves are clearly visible because some are raised and many have cement covers over top of them.



### Image 2:

*Map of Early Tour Stops at Yorktown National Battlefield, Flickinger Papers.*

The National Cemetery is located in the bottom left of the image, labeled stop 15. The zig-zag lines nearby represent earthworks, listed as tour stop 14, "Hornwork."



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