

Antiquities Act. He used it to proclaim 15 new national monuments and make substantial additions to two others. In 1980, Carter signed the Alaskan National Interest Lands Conservation Act, which converted most of these monuments to national parks and preserves. Comprising more than 47 million acres, these additions to the national park system more than doubled its size. Two of the new Alaska monuments were assigned to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and were converted to national wildlife refuges.

Despite its custody of the public domain, the Department of the Interior was not initially responsible for all national monuments. Some, including Grand Canyon and Mount Olympus, were proclaimed on lands previously reserved as national forests and assigned to the Department of Agriculture. Others were proclaimed on military reservations administered by the War Department. Most of these monuments remained under those departments until 1933, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt transferred them by executive order to Interior's National

Park Service. A few were transferred earlier; Grand Canyon came to Interior in 1919 when it became a national park, for example.

Since 1933 the Interior Department has overseen virtually all national monuments. Today it has 74 areas bearing this designation: 73 administered by the National Park Service, and the newest one—Grand Staircase-Escalante in Utah, proclaimed by President Clinton in 1996—administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Not all of them resulted from presidential proclamations under the Antiquities Act; some were directly established by Congress. But the designation remains closely associated with this powerful conservation tool of the Progressive Era, whose legacy to Interior and the American people has been vast.

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Anthropological Connections

Places defined as national patrimony do not stop being local patrimony. In the National Park Service, mounting anthropological evidence demonstrates the connections that persist between present-day peoples and the resources their ancestors used, manufactured, and valued. Although now incorporated into parks and categorized as sites, structures, objects and landscapes, these “national” resources are also crucial markers of a people's own ethnic history and identity.

Even the meanings local people assign to ostensibly identical resources can reflect diversity. The resources at Cane River Creole National Historical Park in Louisiana, for example, offer special opportunities to explore relationships between plantation systems and people in different cultural and political niches. Two plantations are included there, one with a complex of farm outbuildings and the worker quarters that were occupied by enslaved black people



Quarters at Cane River Creole National Historical Park.
Photo by the author.

from about the mid-1800s until abolition, and then by black laborers until the mid-1900s. The other has a “Big House” and the Quarters that black former enslaved laborers and sharecroppers occupied. Ethnographic interviewing of the white French-creole heirs of each plantation highlighted their strong sense of ethnic history, culture, lineage, and the pride they invested in the Big Houses and economically viable enterprises. Former laborers and sharecroppers emphasized pride in their hard work in the fields or behind the Big Houses and in their kitchens. There was conviction about their own contributions to the plantations' economic successes. They associated specific families with cabins in the Quarters, and stressed the neighborly cooperation and celebrations that enriched their lives and created a community. Thus, systematic ethnographic attention to local groups and differences among them indicates that seemingly identical cultural resources, despite fixed boundaries and objective measures, are valued in different ways by different traditional users. Indeed, identifying diverse perspectives wherever Native Americans, African Americans, and others are associated with park resources has guided the applied ethnography program since its start in 1981.

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