

Frank Faragasso and Doug Stover

# African-American History and Culture

## A Remembering

**T**he study of African-American history has changed significantly in recent years. Previously, African-American history focused on a limited number of central themes, such as slavery, the Underground Railroad, and the Civil Rights movement—studies of discrete time periods and events. While these studies contributed important knowledge to our understanding of this history, what was often missing was a clear understanding of historical change and continuity within the larger context of American history. Recent scholarship reveals a more comprehensive and complex history that is moving to a more central place in our society. African-American history has entered our consciousness.

This issue of *CRM* expands the investigation of African-American contributions to American civilization. There is a keen interest in topics previously unexplored, even by people familiar with the field of American history and culture. Our request for articles resulted in a large number of responses from NPS employees, academics, and independent scholars. Selecting articles for publication from so many sources was difficult. Many good articles could not be included because of space.

In the following pages, the reader will be taken to unexpected places and times, such as western frontier towns, Mexican haciendas, Canadian historic places, Independence Hall in Philadelphia, and a sandbank off the coast of

Charleston, South Carolina. Even traditional subjects, such as slavery, reveal exciting new avenues for exploration. There is also a blend of theory and practice, factual information, and practical suggestions for interpretation. Several of our articles defy categorization. Park rangers, interpreters, historians, archeologists, and others may find suggestions for either (1) development of new programs or (2) enrichment of existing interpretive programs.

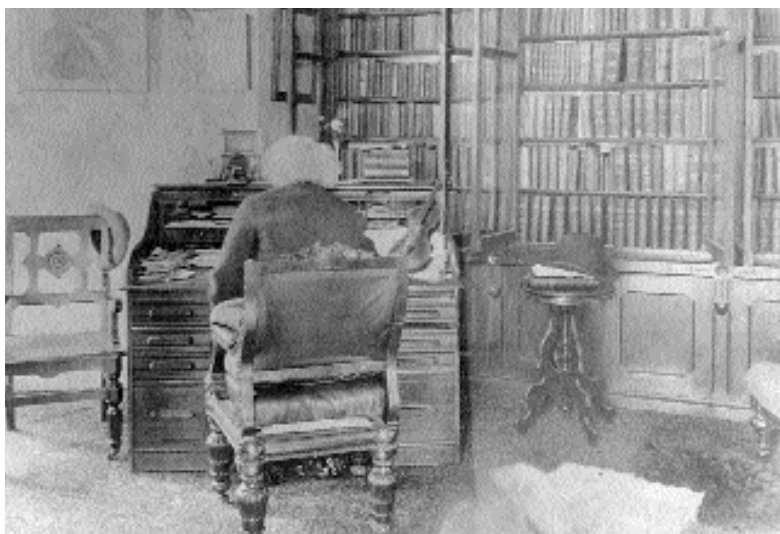
Our lead article, by Juliet Galonska, describes the lives of African-American deputy U.S. marshals who exercised significant police authority in a predominantly white world. They required courage and ingenuity in the performance of their duties. An equally fascinating and revealing part of the history of the Old West is Shirley Boteler-Mock's and Mike Davis's article which provides a rare glimpse of Seminole black culture searching for a place to call home and a sense of identity amidst a society that accepted neither free blacks nor Native Americans.

More traditional in subject matter, but opening new avenues of research, is Jenny Masur's and Kent Lancaster's research into the family archives at Hampton National Historic Site in Towson, Maryland. Park Service professionals, in cooperation with university scholars, are providing valuable insight into the reality of slave life. Another NPS employee, Pam Sanfilippo, tells of efforts to uncover the history of slavery in her lively article about the White Haven plantation (Ulysses S. Grant NHS).

On the familiar subject of the Underground Railroad, we are treated to a masterful analysis from the Canadian perspective by Hilary Russell. She informs the reader regarding both the similarities and the differences between the African-American Canadian experience and that of the United States. Following the theme of the Underground Railroad, Jane Williamson presents astute comments on the treatment of fugitive slaves in Vermont.

The discipline of archeology provides two compelling stories: Paul Shackel's investigation of the John Brown Fort from Harpers Ferry to other locations and back to Harpers Ferry; and while doing archeology pertaining to the Civil War period, Steven D. Smith's investigation of a forgot-

*Frederick Douglass in his library, c. 1890-1895. Photo courtesy Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, NPS.*



ten black soldiers' cemetery. His research is a vivid reminder of how quickly places and events are erased from memory.

Two excellent articles focus on African-American participation in warfare. Gerald T. Altoff, with extensive experience, gives us the black soldier in the War of 1812. Professor P. Reidy, a prominent historian from Howard University, presents his thoughts on the participation of black sailors in the Civil War.

From military conflict we move to education, the segregated school system, and the need to capture that history. Antoinette Lee's article on the M Street School in Washington, DC, and Rachel F. Weekly's article on the Monroe Elementary School in Topeka, Kansas, discuss efforts to preserve a history of segregated education. Many of these schools were superior institutions of learning. Steven Davis provides an important and little-remembered part of the Civil Rights struggle with his illuminating article. He tells us why these sites are important and presents a system for evaluating sites for preservation.

This issue has included six articles that are distinguished by their emphasis on site interpretation. Individually, or as a group, they provide a valuable resource for anyone developing a new interpretation or rethinking an existing one. From George Washington University, thoughtful efforts of four young scholars—Stephanie L. Batiste-Benthan, Michele Gates Moresi, Teresa Anne Murphy, and Marguerite Carnell Rodney—provide interpretative tools for historic sites. Joanne Blacoe, Anna Coxe Toogood, and Sharon A. Brown offer a frank insight into the efforts to interpret African-American history at Independence National Historic Site. Christopher Geist gives us

a clear picture of recent efforts at Colonial Williamsburg to interpret African-American participation in the colonial community. Bob Moore offers his thoughts on the weaving of new themes into existing exhibits at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis. Finally, we have an example of reinterpretation at a site. Ranger Qefiri Colbert presents the history of interpretation at Booker T. Washington National Monument in Virginia. Readers will find both theoretical and practical suggestions for site interpretation.

Eighteen feature articles and numerous shorter pieces constitute an impressive attempt to deepen our understanding of the African-American/Canadian past. Much of that past is lost and much remains to be revealed. We are pleased to make a contribution toward remembering.

We wish to thank the managers of CRM for the opportunity to put together this thematic issue concerning African-American history and culture.

The management of National Capital Parks East has been supportive and permitted us the time to do this work.

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## ***Ethnographic Study***

In 1994, the National Park Service initiated an ethnographic assessment of relationships between contemporary African Americans and resources under its stewardship in 17 parks in the Northeast. Conducted under cooperative agreement with the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, its goals were to provide a general overview of contemporary park-associated African Americans, the historical and legislative basis for relationships between them and park resources, and an evaluation of available data on the associated groups and the traditional cultural and natural resources they use and value. Based on a thorough review of the ethnographic literature, and other relevant published and archival documents, as well as site visits and ethnographic interviews, Principal Investigator Dr. Helan Page and her research team have produced a landmark study that will be available to the public in late 1997.

The Northeast Field Area Applied Ethnography program sponsors and assists research to identify and document resources of significance to African-American communities and groups throughout the region. Park studies include General Grant National Memorial, Saint Paul's Church National Historic Site, and Booker T. Washington National Historic Site. For additional information, contact Rebecca Joseph, Program Manager, New England System Support Office, 15 State Street, Boston, MA 02109 (617-223-5056, beckyjoseph-nps.gov).