



Hampton National Historic Site in Towson, MD. NPS photo.

connections between the scholarship of these topics and each site's history.

Many valuable lessons were learned from this experience. The most favorable reaction came from the Booker T. Washington site in which the team worked on a specific project with a tangible outcome.

Members of the American Studies

team reviewed label text for a new exhibit and provided substantive suggestions for revision. As a result of this collaborative effort on a specific aspect of the site's interpretation, the uses of the assessment and essay were readily apparent. This experience may signal a useful way to structure future collaborations between the National Park Service and The George Washington University.

National Park Service sites are faced with practical problems in seeking to revise and expand interpretive programs; they are often under-staffed and short of funds. This is why collaborative efforts such as our project provide a unique oppor-

tunity for both the Park Service and members of the academy. By forging extensive relations with the Park Service, we gain the practical experience of interpreting history to the public at the same time that we assist the National Park Service in its effort to teach history grounded in the best and most current scholarship. We hope to continue to develop professional partnerships with these and other sites to enhance historical interpretation at the National Park Service.

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## African-American History at Independence NHP

**I**ndependence National Historical Park recently had the opportunity to incorporate African-American history into its interpretive program. To commemorate the bicentennial of the devastating yellow fever epidemic that struck Philadelphia in the summer of 1793, the park highlighted the heroic volunteer efforts of two local African-American leaders—Absolom Jones and Richard Allen. Both preachers, Jones and Allen called on their community to nurse the sick and bury the dead. They labored in a climate of public panic and revulsion, because yellow fever, which brought on black bile vomiting, was generally considered highly contagious. At first thought to be immune, the black volunteers succumbed with whites to the mosquito-borne virus.

After the epidemic ceased in November, the African community's heroic efforts received little recognition. In fact, the first published account of

the epidemic that month accused some of the black nurses of stealing from their patients and gouging them with high prices. Richard Allen and Absolom Jones countered by publishing their own account, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia in the Year 1793*, which included a refutation of the charges.

Independence National Historical Park republished the Jones and Allen *Narrative* and mounted an exhibit explaining the strategic role black Americans played during the crisis in the nation's capital. The park invited members of local institutions that dated back to 1793 and had associations with the epidemic, including representatives from the nation's first African Methodist Episcopal church, to share in a city-wide observation of its bicentennial. The park also featured the story in special tours, drawing on a letter in its own collections written by an apprentice who,

while dying of the fever, wrote his family, "I don't know what the people would do if it was not for the Negroes, as they are the Principal nurses."

This 1993 bicentennial provided one avenue to tell African-American history at Independence National Historical Park, a site Congress set aside for its "outstanding national significance" in the American Revolution and the founding and growth of the United States. Here the park exhibits and interprets the world renowned Liberty Bell, and tells the story of the nation's most significant political documents—the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and Constitution of the United States—adopted in Independence Hall. Benjamin Franklin's Philadelphia home site is also part of the park, set aside by Congress to honor his many contributions to the creation of the nation.

Despite such nationally-significant themes, park staff have continued to bring African-American history into the park's interpretation. Park historians have probed recent research on Philadelphia's 18th- and early-19th-century black population to supplement park themes. As early as the 1740s Benjamin Franklin assisted the Bray Associates, an Anglican Church missionary group, to establish schools for African Americans in Philadelphia. During his far-flung travels as post-master general of the colonies, he helped establish similar schools outside of Pennsylvania. Through his efforts, Franklin became sensitized to the equality of the races and the power of education to change unequal circumstances. A slave owner as a young man, Franklin served as the president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society during his last years of life.

A recent park research report on Independence Square's history discussed the struggle African Americans in the neighborhood faced when they tried to build their own church and bur-

ial ground. Throughout most of the 18th century Independence Square's adjoining square, (now known as Washington Square and a property slated to be incorporated into Independence National Historical Park), served as a Strangers' burial ground and the only sanctioned place for African-American internments. After the heroic efforts during the yellow fever epidemic, white opposition to a separate black church dissolved, and the Free African Society purchased a site half a block south of Independence Square.

Early in the 19th century, however, Philadelphia succumbed to a reactionary climate which led to a city ruling in 1814—a generation after the Declaration of Independence was adopted—to ban African Americans from partaking in the Fourth of July celebrations on the square (then known as the State House Square). In 1837, Pennsylvania's legislatures denied African Americans the right to vote. As the city's electorate cast their ballots at Independence Hall, Philadelphia's blacks again were excluded from participation at the seat of local politics, Independence Square.

In other areas, Philadelphia's African-American community flourished, supplying talented and successful caterers and businessmen for the larger population. At the same time, scores of refugees from slavery arrived in Philadelphia, some of whom risked their freedom by seeking justice in the courtrooms on Independence Square.

These aspects of Philadelphia's history have not yet received much attention, in part because they are difficult and painful chapters of our collective story. As at other parks in the system, Independence National Historical Park has only begun to consider the many means of bringing a more inclusive point of view to its exhibits, tours, and publications. The recent revisiting of the park's

## ***Another Kind of Glory***

*Celebrating the Centennial of the Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts Fifty-Fourth Regiment*

There will be a major conference, "The Massachusetts Fifty-fourth Regiment and Memorial Monument: History and Meaning," from May 28-May 30, 1997. The conference, which will be free and open to the public, will begin on Wednesday evening, May 28, at Harvard University's Sanders Theater. Colonel Shaw attended Harvard and the university played a central role in the installation of the Memorial in 1897. The remainder of the conference will be held at Suffolk University on Boston's Beacon Hill, only a few blocks from the Memorial and the African Meeting House. The entire conference program will be easily accessible for all in attendance as organizers have stressed to presenters that a broad, general audience will be attending. To keep the conference lively, individual sessions will vary in format and presentation styles. A special Thursday evening session at Faneuil Hall, to be moderated by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., DuBois Institute, Harvard University, will examine the best path to empowerment for African Americans. The conversation will reflect upon the historical examples of W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, who spoke at the dedication of the monument in 1897. Potential panelists include Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. and former Congressman Gary Franks.

—Martin Blatt

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primary and secondary interpretive themes for a forthcoming general management plan gave a new chance to address the issues. Contributions of Philadelphia's diverse (religious, ethnic, and racial) population were incorporated into the park's planning documents—into its interpretive themes and its management goals—giving new energy to the park staff's ongoing social history programs.

One such program, *The Silent Majority* walking tour, focuses on African Americans, women, children, and people of different faiths and economic levels. Actors hired by the park performed vignettes of 18th-century African street vendors who offered such eatables as pepper pot soup, a dish with African origins. The goal was not to create a separate slate of programs with minority themes, but to incorporate this information into the mainstream of interpretation. The Liberty Bell, for instance, besides being an international symbol of freedom, also has a story as an abolitionist and civil rights symbol. Special topic tours which focus on servants and women include information on the African servants who toiled in obscurity. Visitors have been pleased with the new tours, and the park has enjoyed requests for these special tours from audiences new to the National Park Service.

Highlighting the contributions of African Americans, or any minority, is controversial, not just with visitors but with park staff, regardless of racial makeup. While many interpreters appreciate the richness that diversity brings to interpretation, others are reluctant to tell the stories of less famous people. There are complaints about the scarcity of source material for "diversity" tours, discussions about the relative merit of political

accomplishments over social history, and nagging claims that programs based on social history are somehow forced or false.

Ongoing, vigorous debate among interpreters weigh the value of telling the stories of the "silent majority" who are mostly missing from mainstream texts. The anniversary of the yellow fever epidemic coincided with the 250th anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's birth, so that several Independence staff members lobbied hard to reserve the park's focus and energy for a traditional observance centered on the life of the author of the Declaration of Independence. On another occasion the search for a contemporary image of an African-American Continental soldier for a park publication and exhibit generated lively discussion among interpreters, historians, and curators about context, the benefits of using a contemporary image, 18th-century attitudes and 20th-century suitability. These debates were, in themselves, an enlightening measure of our own times, values, and attitudes.

To make history relevant to an increasingly diverse American population, the National Park Service needs a more inclusive vision. It is indeed headed in that direction and at Independence National Historical Park the challenge remains to present a balanced and accurate narrative of the events and people that shaped the founding of the nation.

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Christopher D. Geist

## African-American History at Colonial Williamsburg

**C**olonial Williamsburg, Virginia, restored Capital of England's largest, most populous, and wealthiest colony is the most expansive and comprehensive museum village in the nation. Spread over 173 acres with about 500 restored and reconstructed homes, dependencies, shops, taverns, public, and government buildings—88 are original structures—and hundreds of costumed visitors' aides, artisans, and character interpreters the village represents an unparalleled opportunity to interpret the complex social fabric of an important colonial legislative, cultural, and commercial center on the eve of the Revolution.

Until fairly recently that promise was imperfectly realized. In 1775, Williamsburg's population was just short of two thousand, about half of them white. The "Other Half," to use the title of a popular walking tour offered to visitors, was African or African American, most of them slaves.

From early restoration efforts in the 1920s through the 1960s it was the rare visitor who encountered evidence that African Americans had played any role at all in Williamsburg society. Early editions of the village's *Official Guidebook* offered discrete references to "servants," but generally slavery and the major role played by slaves in 18th-century Williamsburg was not evident. By