

PUBLIC PROTEST AS A CLAIM TO CITIZENSHIP:  
TWENTIETH-CENTURY OCCUPATIONS OF WASHINGTON, D.C. AND THEIR  
ROLE IN PUBLIC MEMORY

by

Katherine Crawford-Lackey

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Kathryn L. Sikes, Chair

Dr. Kevin A. Leonard, Chair

Dr. Pippa Holloway

Dr. Barbara J. Little

## ABSTRACT

The National Park Service (NPS) serves as the steward of many of the nation's most significant landscapes, including the civic spaces in the District of Columbia. Not only is this federal agency responsible for preserving public lands, it is also tasked with interpreting the natural and cultural importance of its over 400 units. As caretaker and storyteller of federal lands, the NPS directly participates in shaping public perceptions about the past. The agency, however, has struggled to adequately interpret the stories of all Americans, particularly those who challenged federal authority.

To better understand the National Park Service's process for interpreting contested narratives, this dissertation analyzes two twentieth-century occupation protests that took place on Park Service land in the capital. I consider the NPS's role in facilitating and later interpreting the Bonus Army March, during which World War I veterans occupied Anacostia flats (1932), and the Poor People's Campaign, which included the construction of a small city on the National Mall (1968). Both demonstrations took place over the span of several weeks, making them unique and unprecedented events in the social landscape of protest.

Examining the history of these political protests in the context of the agency's interpretive pedagogy and practice, this study uses unexamined primary sources and oral histories conducted by the author to examine how Washington, DC and its public lands function as a platform for making claims to citizenship. Interviews with NPS park rangers, chiefs of interpretation, and superintendents, illuminate the legacy of the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign demonstrations, document how parks are interpreting

this legacy, and guide recommendations for creating interpretation that entails a more inclusive historical process.

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archaeologists, and interpreters who informed my research. The dissertation may not have come to fruition without her input.

I was honored to interview several National Park Service park rangers, chiefs of interpretation, superintendents, and interpretive trainers. I am deeply appreciative of their time and willingness to speak about their experiences at the National Park Service. I cannot adequately put into words how much they inspired me with their passion and love for the NPS mission. A special thank you to Susan Philpott who not only agreed to an interview, she also shared some of her own research on the Civil Rights Movement in Washington, D.C.

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## CHAPTER I: THE LEGACY OF PROTEST IN WASHINGTON D.C.

In October 2011, hundreds of people set up tents in McPherson Square, a public park in the heart of Washington, D.C.'s central business district. One of the many offshoots of the Occupy Wall Street Movement that began in New York City earlier that fall, protesters sought to bring national attention to the growing wealth disparity in America. Demonstrations sprung up across the country in cities such as Boston, MA, Atlanta, GA, Austin, TX, San Francisco, CA, and Seattle, WA.<sup>1</sup> While part of a broader movement for social and economic change, the occupation of Washington, D.C.'s civic spaces was particularly symbolic as protesters were continuing a tradition established a century before. Indeed, the history and accessibility of public space in Washington, D.C. has been an ongoing exchange between citizens and the federal government since the city's founding in 1790. Public protest became a critical ingredient in shaping America's democratic values as civil and human rights were often only recognized by federal authority in response to the collective resistance and advocacy of citizens themselves. The act of protesting federal action (or inaction) takes on special significance when implemented in places already endowed with historical or political meaning, particularly in the nation's capital.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Occupy Atlanta," (2011), Library of Congress, Archived Web Site, accessed December 06, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0006227/>; "Occupy Austin," Library of Congress, Archived Web Site, accessed December 06, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0006236/>; "Occupy Boston," Library of Congress, Archived Web Site, accessed December 06, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0006226/>; "Occupy San Francisco," Library of Congress, Archived Web Site, accessed December 06, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0006231/>; "Occupy Seattle," Library of Congress, Archived Web Site, accessed December 06, 2019, <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0006229/>.

<sup>2</sup> Lisa Benton-Short, *The National Mall: No Ordinary Public Space* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 5.

Many Americans today associate the act of “protest” with short yet impactful moments of solidarity (such as the 2017 Women’s March or the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom 1963), but the first recognized public protest in the nation’s capital was a drawn out affair that exemplified the power of mass resistance. In 1894, Ohio businessman Jacob Coxey led a group of several hundred unemployed Americans to Washington, DC to lobby Congress to create jobs in response to an ongoing depression. Inspired by Coxey’s actions, individuals from across the country also began to march to Washington, yet few reached their final destination. While Coxey and several other demonstrators were arrested when they sought to access the steps of the Capitol Building, hordes of protesters continued to arrive in the capital throughout the spring of 1894.<sup>3</sup>

Public protest was introduced to mainstream political consciousness through the women’s suffrage movement. The effort to win the vote not only caused political upheaval, it also changed social dynamics as cultural norms prohibited women from entering the public sphere, with the exception of working-class women, particularly women of color. To publicize their cause, suffragists often gave speeches and handed out leaflets on street corners, in public parks, and communal buildings. In the process of demanding the vote, they were also upending gender stereotypes and prompting a broader conversation about the rights endowed in the status of citizenship.<sup>4</sup>

Over the course of the twentieth century, marching on Washington became a symbol of democratic expression, and occupation protests specifically became a way to

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<sup>3</sup> Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 13-26.

<sup>4</sup> But women of color, immigrants, women married to immigrants, Native Americans, and many others continued to be excluded from the voting polls until (and even after) the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

leverage one's physical body to disrupt political agendas and gain national visibility. Decades after Coxe's march on Washington in 1894, a new type of occupation protest took place in the capitol. In the summer of 1932, World War I veterans journeyed to the capital to lobby Congress. While veterans were promised payment for their service in the war, Congress claimed it did not have the funds to award the bonus until 1945. Financially struggling as a result of the Great Depression, service members believed the government should award the bonuses early, prompting many to take their grievances directly to the halls of Congress in 1932. Intending to stay in Washington until they received their bonus, the men set up camp in the mud flats along the south side of the Anacostia River (now Anacostia Park).

While the veterans' occupation of Washington ended with their violent expulsion by the United States Army, this did not deter future organizers from adopting similar protest tactics. In fact, succeeding generations of occupiers, including those involved in the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, invoked the memory of the Bonus marchers.<sup>5</sup> While motivated by a different type of poverty, one systemically designed to ensure the poor's perpetual oppression, participants of the Poor People's Campaign sought to bring greater national attention to the plight of the economically disadvantaged. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, under supervision from officials at the National Park Service (the federal agency tasked with managing the capital's public lands), established a small city on the National Mall south of the Reflecting Pool where approximately 3,000 demonstrators lived during the summer of 1968.

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<sup>5</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 177.

In addition to being critical moments in American political history, the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign have important implications for the social dynamics of the twentieth century. Demonstrators were responding to the social and economic strains of the time and forged a protest strategy still used by organizers today. Despite the significance of these events, the demonstrations have, until recently, been omitted from both historical scholarship and public interpretation. Not only are they largely ignored in publications about social movements, they are also rarely recognized by cultural institutions. Unlike some of the iconic protests in the nation's capital, these two demonstrations were relegated to obscurity, prompting the question, why are some demonstrations remembered and memorialized while others silenced? This dissertation contextualizes this question by comparing the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign and analyzing their place in collective memory today. To that end, my work examines how Washington, DC and its public lands function as a platform for making claims to citizenship, exploring both the legacy of these demonstrations and how they are interpreted by the National Park Service, the steward of the capital's public parks and recreation areas.

### **Interpretation by the National Park Service**

Established by an act of Congress in 1916, the National Park Service began as an agency of the Department of Interior (DOI) to “promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations . . . to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein . . . for the enjoyment

of future generations.”<sup>6</sup> The NPS is often referred to as America’s story-teller as it interprets the history associated with parks and historic sites. While the federal agency embraces its role as the steward and story-teller of the nation’s public lands, it sometimes struggles in its effort to tell the stories of all Americans, including that of the Bonus Army and Poor People’s Campaign. As the NPS currently manages the sites where the demonstrations took place, Anacostia Park and the National Mall, the agency should in some way be addressing the history of these protests.

In the past, the NPS was preoccupied with preserving and interpreting the places and history associated with predominately white male Americans. This failure to fully address the diversity of Americans in their retelling of the past, led the National Park Service to spend the first decades of the twenty-first century reassessing its overall mission and its interpretive strategy, explored in more detail in Chapter V. Using the Poor People’s Campaign and Bonus Army as case studies of two demonstrations in the capital, this dissertation seeks to understand the National Park Service’s role in facilitating and interpreting these events.

The term “interpretation” is commonly used within the agency and refers to how staff members communicate the importance of a park, both in terms of its natural resources and historical significance, to the public. Interpretation can take the form of personal services, such as educational programs, ranger talks and tours, or non-personal services, including wayside markers, brochures, exhibits, even digital content. Studying current NPS interpretive practice in theory and in practical application this dissertation

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<sup>6</sup> Lary Dilsaver, “An Act to Establish A National Park Service, and for Other Purposes,” Approved Aug 25, 1916 (30 Stat. 535) in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, 46.

offers a clearer picture of how government agencies managed these properties in the past, and why twentieth-century demonstrations chose such spaces for protests, and how current NPS management of Anacostia Park and the National Mall impacts public memory of these demonstrations today.

### **The Significance of the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign**

To study how narratives inform public memory, I examined the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign because they deviated from more traditional methods of protest. Both demonstrations represent citizens' reaction to the social and economic climate of the 1930s and 1960s. Motivated by poverty and class struggle, these two protests are distinct from one another as veterans in the Bonus Army sought compensation for services rendered while participants of the Poor People's Campaign demanded redress for a discriminatory policies that systematically disenfranchised the poor. But participants in both events thought their government was, if not responsible for their financial misfortune, at least obligated to respond.<sup>7</sup>

In the years following World War I (1914-1918), many American military veterans believed they were entitled to payment for their service. In 1932, veterans from across the country reacted to the economic hardship of the Great Depression by marching to the capital to demand the federal government to pay bonuses not set to be released until 1945. In the spring of 1932, veterans in the northwest mobilized under the

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<sup>7</sup> Bonus marchers did not hold the federal government responsible for their poverty to the same level Poor People's campaign participants did. The World War I veterans were frustrated with Congress' lack of initiative in enacting a bill to pay their bonuses, yet they did not view Congress as the root of the problem. Those temporarily living in Resurrection City, however, blamed systemic racism and classism for their inability to maintain an acceptable standard of living.

leadership of Portland veteran Walter W. Waters. As Waters and other veterans began their march to the capital, their efforts galvanized other World War I veterans across the country. Between May through July of that year, approximately 15,000-20,000 veterans and their families marched to and occupied Washington, D.C.

In contrast, the Poor People's Campaign grew out of Martin Luther King Jr.'s frustration with the lack of progress achieved by previous demonstrations of the early-to-mid 1960s. King sought to shift his focus on Black civil rights to human rights, recognizing the role class played in the perpetual subjugation of the American public, specifically people of color. Participants, who included men, women, and children, relocated their lives for six weeks to bring greater awareness about the plight of the poor in America. By establishing a small city on the National Mall called Resurrection City, organizers sought to show the rest of America the true face of poverty. Occupying the city, equipped only with basic amenities, protesters hoped fellow citizens would recognize the struggles that accompanied economic hardship.

In contrast to the organizers of the Poor People's Campaign, veterans in the Bonus Army did not undertake a publicity campaign and they did not make an effort to explain their tactics to the public. However, many of the veterans acted on similar sentiments in that they left their homes and families with the intention of staying in Washington, D.C. until they received their bonuses.<sup>8</sup> But the two demonstrations, while taking place several decades apart, are inextricably linked as King, the architect of the Poor People's Campaign, intended the demonstration to serve as "a historic reminder of

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<sup>8</sup>Barber claims that while the march began as a way to demand World War I bonuses, veterans shifted their agenda and tried to achieve a more equitable society by emphasizing the importance of families in American society. Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 80.

the bonus marchers of the thirties.”<sup>9</sup> While more traditional protests (such as the parades and marches of social movements like the women’s suffrage movement and the early Black Civil Rights Movement) sought to gain legitimacy through elaborate processions and high participation rates, the Bonus Army and Poor People’s Campaign hoped that the duration of the protests would capture the public’s attention.

The 1932 and 1968 demonstrations are unique in that they spanned several weeks, with protesters using their physical presence in the nation’s capital to gain the attention of lawmakers, residents, and the general public, allowing their voices to be heard on a national scale. By exposing their bodies to the elements (through cold, hot and rainy weather), sleeping in muddy quarters, and occupying land without proper facilities, demonstrations sought to achieve tangible change. Unlike other social movements that relied on single-day protests, marches, and parades, these occupations allowed protests to have a prolonged presence in the capital and functioned as a tangible display of the poverty that plagued America.

By examining these two demonstrations, I attempt to address dual aims: it undertakes a historical study of how citizens challenged federal authority through occupations protest in their quest for change, and it analyzes the role of government (specifically the National Park Service) in using historical interpretation to promote citizenship and shape public memory. By examining the relationship between the government and its people, this research identifies **how** citizens negotiated access to civic

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<sup>9</sup> Journalist Jose Yglesias chronicled his involvement in the Poor People’s Campaign, including his interactions with King, in a 1968 publication in the *New York Times Magazine*. He claimed King intentionally wanted to conjure memories of the Bonus Army by building a shantytown on the National Mall. Jose Yglesias, “Dr. King’s March on Washington, Part II,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 31, 1968.

spaces for the purpose of demanding government intervention. Using primary source documents not yet analyzed in formal scholarship, including a series of oral histories with NPS interpreters (conducted by the author) and National Park Service documents pertaining to the establishment and demolition of Resurrection City, the following chapters also address how the federal government acknowledged contested histories associated with protest in NPS formal interpretation.

The primary sources used in this dissertation include federal documents, newspaper articles, personal memoirs, and oral histories housed at both local and federal archives. To analyze competing narratives between the United States government and World War I veterans, I reference declassified War Department documents detailing the government's response to the Bonus Army, specifically correspondences between officials in President Herbert Hoover's cabinet and the U.S. Army, as well as military reports detailing the process of evicting veterans from the Anacostia flats in the summer of 1932. Portland veteran Walter Waters recorded his version of events in his memoir, *B.E.F.: The Whole Story of the Bonus Army*. Waters' account details Portland veterans' journey to the capital, their struggle to find temporary lodging, and their removal from Anacostia. The *Bonus Expeditionary Forces Newspaper*, a paper published by the veterans themselves, is also as a rich resource that documents their effort to win public support and capture the attention of both the president and Congress. Available at the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., the newspaper also chronicled the conditions of camp life, including the lack of housing and supplies.

Similar to the Bonus Army, sources documenting the Poor People's Campaign reveal conflicting perspectives; while a number of Congressional representatives and

officials in executive branch expressed the need to keep what they perceived as potentially violent protesters away from the capital city, participants felt maligned by the federal government which they perceived as hindering their right to free speech in public places. But unlike the Bonus Army, there was a level of cooperation between some federal agencies and the organizers of the campaign, at least for a time. To study the relationship between the people and government, I referenced documents from the National Park Service and Department of Interior documenting the interactions between DOI officials and campaign participants. I also examine the National Park Service's management of Resurrection City through documents such as permits, reports on site visits to Resurrection City, and internal memos.

While the previously mentioned sources provide evidence on how federal officials facilitated and reacted to the campaign, there are several critical sources I did not consult due to time constraints, specifically the Ralph Bunch Oral History Collection at Howard University in Washington, D.C. This collection features interviews from men and women who participated in Civil Right Movement protests, including the Poor People's Campaign. The collection contains approximately 700 interviews and is part of the Civil Rights Documentation Project. The King Center in Atlanta, Georgia also contains documents authored by Martin Luther King, Jr. and would have been a valuable addition in referencing his perspectives on poverty.

To better understand the relationship between the American people and its government, the following chapters examine case studies of occupation protests in the District of Columbia and how protest organizers responded to and worked with local authorities and members of the National Park Service. By comparing protests that took

place throughout the twentieth century, this analysis speaks to how stakeholders used public land to make claims to rights of citizenship. The dissertation concludes with an examination of how these events are interpreted in NPS in the present day and it offers suggestions for incorporating the history of the demonstrations in official programming.

### **Historiographical Context**

Studying accounts of the Bonus Army march and the Poor People's Campaign, two different demonstrations that grew out of the public's frustration with America's persistent and unequal economic stratification, I examine competing narratives produced by protesters versus government institutions. This research is unique as it relies on primary documentation rarely examined in existing scholarship, which itself is sparse. Some of the most notable coverage of the Bonus Army includes Roger Daniels' *The Bonus March: An Episode of the Great Depression* (1971), Paul Dickson's and Thomas B. Allen's *The Bonus Army: An American Epic* (2004), and Jerome Tuccille's *The War Against the Vets: The World War I Bonus Army During the Great Depression*. These publications trace the history of the veterans from their service in World War I through the payment of the bonus in 1936. The books contain chapters on the Bonus Army march to the capital, yet there is little analysis about the implications of the demonstration in informing the tradition of protest. Daniels' coverage is most extensive, drawing from government documents from the Department of Treasury, Department of Justice, and the United States Army Commands. Dickson and Allen offer an interesting analysis as they study reports compiled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), documents that remained classified until 2000. This dissertation uses these declassified files and, unlike

other publications, draws extensively from the *B.E.F. News*, a newspaper published by the veterans themselves. It should also be noted that with the exception of Rodgers, the authors are not trained historians; in fact, they had their own agendas for pursuing this line of research.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, the Poor People's Campaign is an understudied topic in American history. While there is a wealth of research on the Black Civil Rights Movement, the 1968 campaign did not receive serious study beginning until the later 1990s and early 2000s. In 1999, Gerald D. McKnight wrote *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People's Campaign*, a comprehensive history of the protest that uses FBI documents to demonstrate how the intelligence community attempted to thwart the campaign's success. But McKnight concludes that the campaign was a "dismal failure," a claim contemporary historians challenge, including Sylvie Laurent and Amy Nathan Wright.<sup>11</sup>

Sylvie Laurent's *King and the Other America: The Poor People's Campaign and the Quest for Economic Equality* (2018), while less of a comprehensive analysis of the campaign, focuses on how the Southern Christian Leadership Conference planned and executed the demonstration in collaboration with other oppressed communities.<sup>12</sup> Despite Laurent's nuanced approach to the study of the protest, Wright's 2007 dissertation "Civil Rights 'Unfinished Business': Poverty, Race, and the 1968 Poor People's Campaign" is

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen were film makers, conducting research on the Bonus Army for a documentary (which later became a book). Jerome Tuccille is a libertarian politician and investment broker.

<sup>11</sup> Gerald D. McKnight, *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People's Campaign* (Boulder: Westview, 1998), 141.

<sup>12</sup> Sylvie Laurent, *King and the Other America: The Poor People's Campaign and the Quest for Economic Equality* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

one of the only works that examines the campaign in its entirety, studying the protest's roots in the Black Civil Rights Movement as well as its implications on class-based activism.<sup>13</sup> She draws from a number of primary resources, including collections at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Texas, the King papers and SCLC files at the King Library and Archives in Atlanta, Georgia, and the Ralph Bunche Civil Rights Oral History Project based at Howard University in Washington, D.C.<sup>14</sup> Wright, however, downplays several aspects of the campaign, such as organizers' efforts to meet with various cabinet members, including the Secretary of the Interior Steward Lee Udall. Department of Interior. Studying unexplored documents from the Department of Interior and National Park Service, this dissertation addresses the Southern Christian Leadership's willingness to working with members of the NPS to publicize their grievances and secure a site for the protest.

Primary sources pertaining to both demonstrations, including protesters' accounts, media reports, and government documents, indicate that demonstrators sought to insert their voices into official accounts by creating their own media coverage. The Bonus Army produced their own press (the *Bonus Expeditionary Forces Newspaper* also referred to as the *B.E.F. News*) and the Poor People's Campaign established educational exhibits. Despite protesters' attempts to control the messaging of the demonstrations, their voices have largely become lost in contemporary scholarship and public interpretation. Instead of studying these protests in the context of other social movements

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<sup>13</sup> Aaron Bryant, Photography Curator for the National Museum of African American History and Culture wrote a dissertation on the protest entitled, *City of Hope and the 1968 Poor People's Campaign: Poverty, Protests, and Photography*, which is not available for public viewing until 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Amy Nathan Wright, "Civil Rights 'Unfinished Business': Poverty, Race, and the 1968 Poor People's Campaign" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2007).

of the early-to-mid twentieth century, scholars dismiss their relevancy, allowing the same sins of class oppression to be perpetuated in the present.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, I argue in this dissertation that these two movements had a significant impact on a long tradition of visible public protest of citizens against the federal government, specifically on public land in the capital. They contribute to narratives of nationally significant events, such as the Civil Rights Movement, as well as to contemporary analysis on the role of local places in contextualizing American history more broadly. The marriage of local and national history by analyzing the social and cultural significance of “place” is a strategy the National Park Service can use when interpreting the history of its units.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the mid-1990s, Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot wrote *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, which provides a useful model for analyzing historic events and their primary sources in the context of present-day interpretation of those events and their legacies. He hypothesized that access to power provides certain select individuals the opportunity to influence how the past is remembered. Specifically, Trouillot discusses the ability to control the means of historical production by possessing authority over the documentation of the past, the archival of sources, and the selection of sources for the purpose of writing scholarship.

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<sup>15</sup> As scholars Holly J. McCammon, Karen E. Campbell, Ellen M. Granberg and Christine Mowery argue, those historians studying broad social movements “must consider not only the mobilization of the movements but the broad context in which those movements operate, including political and other social dynamics that can affect movement success.” Holly J. McCammon, Karen E. Campbell, Ellen M. Granberg and Christine Mowery, “How Movements Win: Gendered Opportunity Structures and U.S. Women's Suffrage Movements, 1866 to 1919,” *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (Feb., 2001), pp. 49-70, 50.

Using the Haitian Revolution as a case study, Trouillot explored how powerful figures influenced the retelling of the past, shaping how the rest of the world interpreted the history of how the small country was established. The struggle of enslaved and free blacks to overthrow French colonial rule comprises the overarching narrative of the Haitian war for independence, yet a lesser known “war within the war” entailed black Creoles fighting against former African slaves. Creole officers, forced to surrender and join French troops, waged war against bands of formerly enslaved Africans who refused to capitulate. As former slaves began to defeat French forces, many Creole officers defected and joined their African brothers. But African leaders such as Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci questioned the loyalty of Creole soldiers like Henri Christophe and refused to fight alongside them.<sup>16</sup>

In the power struggle that ensued, Christophe captured and killed Sans Souci, erecting a palace near the site of the murder. Christophe named the palace Sans-Souci, and Trouillot argues that this “peculiar” choice of name erased the presence of Sans Souci the man from historical memory. Trouillot acknowledges that while the existence of Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci is recorded in historical documentation, few historians make the connection between the soldier’s contentious relationship with Christophe and the name of the royal palace. Furthermore, when tour guides at the now dilapidated palace (a world UNESCO site) are asked specifically about the name Sans Souci, “few guides are prone to volunteer that “San Souci” was also the name of a man and that this man was killed by Henri Christophe himself.”<sup>17</sup> Establishing himself as the monarch (the first and

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<sup>16</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 33-50.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

only king) of the newly established Kingdom of Haiti, Christophe possessed the power and means to erase the existence of his most prolific adversary. Contemporary scholarship provides few references to Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci, and his pivotal role in establishing the independent country of Haiti is largely forgotten.<sup>18</sup>

Distinguishing between “the past ” and “history” (past events versus how they are recorded), Trouillot demonstrates how access to power can lead to unequal influence over historical narratives, resulting in new emphases, distortions, or erasures of narratives through the selection of sources.<sup>19</sup> Trouillot’s investigation into the construction of historical knowledge provides a valuable framework when assessing the historicization of both the Bonus Army and Poor People’s Campaign. The Haitian anthropologist identifies four tangible points or “moments” when silences occur in the narrative, including at “the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).”<sup>20</sup> The power operating in each one of these “moments,” however, is not necessarily identical or equal. Trouillot distinguishes between moment of “fact creation” and that of “fact-assembly,” and he notes that people are participating in these processes as both actors and narrators. For example, a member of the press reporting on the Bonus Army or Poor People’s Campaign (fact creation) is a different exercise of power than an archivist chronicling those records (fact assembly). The press, government officials responding to the protest, and demonstrators themselves are all (unequal) participants in the history they

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 40-44.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 26.

are creating. The archivist is a non-participant in this history, yet they exert a certain authority over what documents are preserved, how they are catalogued, and who can access them.<sup>21</sup>

The struggle for control of the official history of the two demonstrations is seen through the primary sources of both demonstrations. They were maligned by the intelligence community, the executive and legislative branches, and the media, which swayed public sentiment. Sharing their vision for the demonstrations, organizers created their own press outlets and educational exhibits rather than allowing reporters and government officials to hijack the symbolism behind what they were attempting to achieve. Despite efforts to communicate with the press and educate members of the public, organizers were unable to elicit the wide-spread sympathy needed to achieve their immediate demands, The Poor People's Campaign resulted in Congress allotting \$100,000,000 to fund school lunch programs and other social programs in an attempt to address the widespread hunger that accompanied economic hardship.<sup>22</sup> These successes, however, were largely ignored by the media and have since been downplayed by federal officials overseeing the sites at which these events occurred. By crafting a narrative about the "failure" of the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign, the media not only influenced public perception; it also laid the framework for how future scholars interpreted these demonstrations. A number of the primary sources, including press coverage and internal federal memos, supported the notion that the protests were ill-conceived, inefficiently executed, and ultimately unsuccessful, and later scholars allowed

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>22</sup> Isaac L. Jackson, "Resurrection City: The Dream, the Accomplishments," *Ebony Magazine* 23, no. 12 (October, 1968).

these assertions to guide their research, further solidifying the demonstrations as unworthy of commemoration and irrelevant to the other social movements of the mid-to-late twentieth century.

Many of the surviving primary documents about the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign were written and recorded by federal officials, including internal memorandums between presidential cabinet members, reports from law enforcement, and press releases to the public. Accounts from protesters exist due in large part to their insistence on chronicling their side of the story, yet these sources are not easily found in federal repositories such as the National Archives and Records Administration and the Library of Congress. Recognizing the various perspectives of these two demonstrations underscores the importance of multivocality in public interpretation in order to recognize the most authentic version of the past. Can these competing narratives be validated in public memory? How are the legacies of these two demonstrations interpreted and memorialized on the landscape today? Attempting to answer these questions entailed understanding how various agents participate in the historical process.

As Trouillot noted, "sources imply choices" – about what to record and preserve.<sup>23</sup> Silences also occur not necessarily from an absence of fact, but from a misinterpretation of that knowledge. These "moments" are tools that help historians better identify methods of suppression. The framework for identifying silences also underpins one of Trouillot's core arguments: "what history is matters less than how history works".<sup>24</sup> The relevance of history, by extension, lies not in the knowledge itself,

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<sup>23</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 48.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

but in the process and exercise of power that elevates some historical narratives over others. While historians will never have full knowledge of the past, their role is to use existing sources to piece together a version of history. This sociohistorical process of recreating the past is one rooted in power and privilege. By extension, the dissemination of historical knowledge (“history,” or scholars’ interpretation of it) is subject to biases that result in “cycles of silence.”<sup>25</sup> For example, the availability and accessibility of surviving sources on the Bonus Army and Poor People’s Campaign influences how scholars write about the past, which informs subsequent public interpretation. But the sources that often survive belong to those with access to materials to record and preserve such accounts. Trouillot also notes that perceptions of the past (and, as a result, the writing of the narrative), are influenced by the present.

While Trouillot’s scholarship focused on revealing how power and privilege allow individuals to more easily shape historical narratives, it also addressed the critical role physical geography plays in interpreting the past. The Bonus Army and the Poor People’s Campaign took place on public land now cared for by the National Park Service. But as the following chapters demonstrate, the historical interpretation of Anacostia Park (where veterans camped in 1932) and the National Mall (the site of Resurrection City) typically do not emphasize legacies of civic protest. Examining the Bonus Army’s occupation of the Anacostia flats (now Anacostia Park) located on the south side of the Anacostia River, and the presence of the Poor People’s Campaign in West Potomac Park near the Reflecting Pool, this dissertation attempts to understand how protesters

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 26.

negotiated access to the landscape and how these events are interpreted by the National Park Service today.

Finally, Trouillot's work prompts the question of who deserves to be memorialized on the landscape. There is a direct correlation between memorialization and National Park Service interpretation; those people (such as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson) and events commemorated on the capital landscape are more often the subject of public interpretation. As the monuments in Washington, DC, (especially those on the Mall) denote national importance, this form of remembrance gives specific events and people symbolic inclusion into the collective conscious of America. But not all historical moments are deemed worthy of remembrance. Who decides what history is significant enough to warrant memorialization and interpretation? Due to Washington, DC's connection to federal authority, the process for establishing memorials is complicated and usually requires an act of Congress or approval of the National Park Service. (A more in-depth analysis of this process is included in chapter 5.) As the federal government—specifically the executive and legislative branches—has ultimate authority over what is worthy of remembrance in the capital, it complicates the process of commemorating events and people that challenged federal authority. How can the federal government authentically recognize opposing narratives? This question is further complicated by that fact that the National Park Service is steward of public land in Washington, DC and is therefore in charge of preserving and interpreting the history and significance of those places.

## **Summary and Dissertation Overview**

Long-term occupation of federal land is still used as a form of protest today, as demonstrated by the Occupy DC movement. While these three protests, the Bonus Army, the Poor People's Campaign, and Occupy DC, occurred over eight decades, their similarities reveal a pattern to this type of protest: maintaining a physical presence on popular public landscapes in the capital has historically been unsuccessful in achieving protester demands, yet the strategy itself garnered mass media attention and raised national public consciousness relating to the wealth disparity in America.

The following chapters include analyses of the demonstrations as well as an overview of National Park Service interpretive practice. Chapter 2 examines the founding of Washington, DC and how such symbolism came to be endowed in the city's public spaces, addressing how these landscapes were deemed ideal for later acts of protests. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the Bonus Expeditionary Forces (or Bonus Army) and their march to Washington, DC in 1932. Reviewing copies of the *B.E.F. News* as well as government documents, the chapter concludes by analyzing the competing accounts about the veterans' eviction from Anacostia. Analyzing scholarship on the Civil Rights Movement and the Poor People's Campaign, Chapter 4 studies how the Southern Christian Leadership Conference worked with members of the National Park Service to secure a permit to occupy the National Mall. Using never before analyzed records, the chapter also describes the intricate process of erecting a small city in the heart of the nation's capital. Chapters 5 and 6 examines current trends in NPS (informed by NPS resources and interviews with NPS personnel) and offers recommendations for how to more effectively create interpretation about these two protests. This dissertation also

examines the government's power to approve or deny access to the landscape implicating it as an active agent within the large narrative of American history. It argues that more attention should be given to the study of NPS interpretation and the process by which federal agencies choose the stories they interpret.

## CHAPTER II: THE FORMATION OF THE CAPITOL LANDSCAPE

The symbolism of Washington, DC's public parks and grounds has been defined and redefined since the founding of the city over two hundred years ago. The changing physical geography and meaning of capital parks has both local and national connotations because federal policies regulating the management and accessibility of recreational space in Washington, DC are directly connected to broader trends in how the federal government interprets its role as steward of landscapes across the nation. Expectations for how the public should interact with these civic spaces shifted over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as parcels of land exchanged ownership due to city development and expansion and as reform efforts such as the City Beautiful Movement inspired the rehabilitation of urban landscapes. As the federal government took greater responsibility in preserving public land in both the eastern and western US (including parks in the District of Columbia), it took an active role in prescribing how such spaces should be used by members of the public. Once overseen by the Army Corps of Engineers, public land in Washington, DC slowly came under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service (NPS), an agency established in 1916. This chapter examines the history and symbolism of public land in the capital and its implications for broader social trends, including conservation and beautification movements of the early twentieth century. The following pages also briefly consider the National Park Service's role as gatekeeper of national civic spaces for the use of protest as well as the agency's role in interpreting those stories, though this topic is analyzed in more depth in later chapters. Tracing the emergence of the capital's public parks as platforms of protest, this chapter explores how the meaning

of space in Washington – including Anacostia Park, McPherson Square, Lafayette Park, the Capitol Grounds, and the National Mall – became an ongoing exchange between those in power and their constituents.

The capital’s public grounds were not always endowed with such political power. The symbolism inherent in these spaces is fluid as meanings change with the establishment of new memorials and federal buildings.<sup>1</sup> As local and federal lawmakers changed boundaries, built government structures, and dedicated additional monuments, they ascribed new meaning to the capital landscape. Acts of public protest further shaped the symbolism of capital parks, redefining how Americans expressed claims to citizenship and the rights endowed in that status. It took generations of civically minded Americans to challenge systems of power to demand greater access to resources and participation in the political process, and their efforts established the tradition of marching on Washington.

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<sup>1</sup> Architectural historian Kirk Savage’s *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*, examines the ever-changing symbolism of the capital’s memorial landscapes, from the time of the city’s founding up through the early twenty-first century. While Washington, DC’s public squares were once home to a hodge-podge of memorials, the process of designating and distributing monuments across the landscape became heavily regulated, particularly in the early twentieth century as federal lawmakers invited noted landscape architects to redesign and beautify the capital. The monuments themselves ascribe significance to the landscape as does the design of the space. Savage notes that in its over two-hundred-year history, Washington, DC experienced several key landscape designs, each with its own purpose (described in more detail throughout the chapter). As the capital’s civic spaces changed in design and as new monuments were added, the symbolism and use of city spaces constantly fluctuated and evolved, implying that “the history of commemoration is therefore a history of change and transformation.” As federal authorities mandate changes to the public grounds and transportation routes through the city, those spaces are “in turn transformed by the people who occupy and use them.” Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 11. Historian Lucy G. Barber examines similar themes in her book *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition*. Less interested in monuments and their implications on public space, Barber focuses on how leaders of various social movements throughout the twentieth century used landscapes such as Pennsylvania Avenue and the National Mall to insert themselves into public sphere by demanding greater visibility and citizenship rights. Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

Social movements and acts of protests in the twentieth century solidified the capital's public lands as important platforms of democracy where citizens negotiated access to exercise rights guaranteed in the Constitution. Public perception and use of Washington's parks changed as citizens developed a tradition of protest. Parks and recreational areas became places of protest that facilitated the clash of competing political agendas in controlled spaces, allowing groups to express dissent and frustration in socially acceptable forms. Writing to elected officials was at one time the socially accepted form of protest until unemployed Americans, women suffragists, military veterans, and early Black civil rights advocates reimagined how to leverage public space as a powerful tool of civil discourse. In the process of redefining the act of public protest, these early demonstrators also challenged notions of "respectability" at a time when confrontation (especially when initiated by marginalized groups) was seen as subversive, unpatriotic, and even treasonous. Due to their efforts, the practice of presenting a physical presence in the capital to confront elected officials and protest injustice became a viable (and often successful) strategy. Twentieth-century activists adopted a more confrontational strategy that forced federal officials to acknowledge the demands of the people in a very public way.<sup>2</sup>

Using civic space for protests often attracted the attention of local communities, media outlets, and (as intended) elected leaders. While historians have debated the effectiveness of many of the demonstrations, the mere act of protest is a testament to the

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Frances Berry's work, specifically her book *History Teaches Us to Resist*, identifies how more confrontational forms of protest yield results. She implies that while the quest for greater civil liberties for various social groups entails citizens using various tactics, the more visible forms of resistance have succeeded in gaining public attention and support. Mary Frances Berry, *History Teaches Us to Resist: How Progressive Movements Have Succeeded in Challenging Times* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

collective power of the people to confront government officials. However, access to these spaces is not guaranteed; citizens have historically had to negotiate and justify their use of the Washington, DC's public grounds, as they do today.<sup>3</sup> This chapter examines the history and development of public land in Washington, DC, specifically the Capitol Grounds, National Mall, and Anacostia Park from the city's founding in 1790 up through the twentieth century. Other notable protest sites, including Lafayette Square and McPherson Square, are woven throughout to provide a broader understanding of how these open spaces were incorporated within the monumental core. While all are included as part of the capital landscape, these civic spaces have varying symbolism; the Capitol Grounds and Lafayette Square frame structures of executive and legislative power, the National Mall is the symbolic heart of the city and a gathering place for all Americans while Anacostia Park is a lesser-known recreation park, and McPherson Square, located in the central business district, is one of the city's many smaller public parks. Despite varying degrees of local and national importance, each of these spaces has served as a site of protest. Tracing the symbolism of these public parks and recreational areas in the capital enhances an understanding of how twentieth-century social movements relied on attention-grabbing demonstrations to capture national interest and garner public sympathy.

This chapter provides context on how the capital landscape was formed and managed, as well as how early protests and parades of the late-nineteenth and early-

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<sup>3</sup> Lisa Benton-Short explores how various actors have historically had to negotiate access to symbolic spaces in the capital. She examines the influence factors such as land management (or mismanagement), federal oversight, and protest have on the symbolism of the capital's national landscapes. Lisa Benton-Short, *The National Mall: No Ordinary Public Space* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2016).

twentieth set the stage for later demonstrations. Providing an overview of the inception of the National Park Service and how this federal agency assumed responsibility for the grounds in the District of Columbia, it sets the stage for the following chapters which examine the often-forgotten occupation protests of the capital. As the steward of public parks and recreation areas, the NPS has authority to grant or deny access to federal land for the use of protest, and its permitting process has become an integral aspect of place-making, ascribing meaning to the landscape through protest. The following pages attempt to provide insight on how federal policies and land regulation practices impact public use and understanding of civic spaces in the nation's capital. While not an exhaustive history of protest, this chapter seeks to establish how the National Park Service's stewardship of the capital's recreation spaces informs its interpretation of sites of protest, specifically occupation demonstrations including the 1932 Bonus Army March and the Poor People's Campaign of 1968.

### **The Founding of a Federal City**

The story of public land in the capital is one that includes a vision of grand avenues, open markets, interconnected canals, and public squares – a city fit for the new democracy with room to expand. In 1790, Congress agreed to establish a permanent capital along the Potomac River, and with George Washington's presidential proclamation in early 1791, work began to survey, map, and establish the city. Washington hired French architect Pierre Charles L'Enfant to design the layout of the

capital.<sup>4</sup> The Frenchman envisioned streets in a rectangular grid pattern with parks and public squares “from which great avenues radiated in diagonals, cutting through the gridded streets at odd angles.”<sup>5</sup> His plan for the city included over two dozen open areas in a variety of shapes, including circles, squares, and triangles.<sup>6</sup> These civic spaces were part of a broader plan for an accessible city meant for rapid growth with its memorials, markets, and public buildings. While L’Enfant’s intention to create a bustling city did not immediately come to fruition, his designs reveal his attempt to endow the landscape with unspoken symbolism through the implementation of a two-street system that led residents and visitors to open squares and markets decorated with monuments and memorials to great American figures.

Established out of necessity, Washington, D.C. was “a new community for a new sovereign”, with the presence of federal authority at the heart of L’Enfant’s design.<sup>7</sup> The planned transportation arteries through the city were not only critical for facilitating trade and travel; they also reinforced the centrality of the various branches of government while paying homage to Washington, the founder of the nation. These routes included Pennsylvania Avenue, connecting the White House and Capitol Building, as well the National Mall, envisioned as a “Grand Avenue” extending westward from the Capitol,

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<sup>4</sup> After the 1801 Organic Act endowed Congress with the authority over the District of Columbia, Congressional representatives created a local legislature to assist in running the city. Congress retained authority, but it failed to create a comprehensive local government, which arguably contributed to the lack of public improvement projects in the early years of the capital. William C. di Giacomantonio, “To Sell Their Birthright for a Mess of Potage’: The Origins of D.C. Governance and the Organic Act of 1801,” *Washington History* 12 no. 1 (Spring/Summer, 2000), pp. 30-48.

<sup>5</sup> Savage, *Monument Wars*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> John W. Reys, *Washington on View: The Nation’s Capital Since 1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 8.

<sup>7</sup> James Sterling Young, *The Washington Community, 1800-1828* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 1.

ending at a memorial to the first president. The Avenue was originally designed as a wide thoroughway, lined with elaborate gardens and imposing houses intended for high level government officials.

Scholars have long studied the French architect's motives for designing such a unique grid plan for the capital. Academics such as Sarah Luria, an English professor at the College of the Holy Cross, perceived L'Enfant's diagonal street designs as providing the most direct route from one branch of government to another, symbolizing the separation of powers established by the Constitution. Studying the "interactions between political visions and the built environment" Luria interpreted L'Enfant's plan for Washington, DC as the physical manifestation of democracy.<sup>8</sup> Examining the Frenchman's intention for the city and the placement of government buildings, civic spaces, and more, Luria claimed that the capital was "a site where the abstract concept of the nation could be experienced as a physical reality".<sup>9</sup> Not all scholars, however, ascribe the same level of symbolism to L'Enfant's vision. In his book *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*, architectural historian Kirk Savage suggested a more practical impetus for L'Enfant's design, noting that the Frenchman's "plan of Washington [was] a nearly perfect diagram of the military principles of territorial occupation."<sup>10</sup> While this proposed

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<sup>8</sup> Sarah Luria studies how the planning of the capital was intended to create "a connected, national landscape" by examining physical space in the capital, specifically how powerful men imposed their influence over the city's architecture and landscape design. Sarah Luria, *Capital Speculations: Writing and Building Washington, DC* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2006), xxvi. Benton-Short agrees that L'Enfant's design symbolized the physical manifestation of democracy, with extensive park space to practice democracy. She interprets the French architect's vision for the National Mall as "represent[ing] the fact that open space conferred visible power and strength and symbolized an open, not closed, society." Benton-Short, *The National Mall*, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Luria, *Capital Speculations*, xiii.

<sup>10</sup> Savage, *Monument Wars*, 30.

layout for the city allowed for the installation of monuments and recreational use of public spaces, Savage interpreted L'Enfant's design as a "counterinsurgency tactic," intended to prevent another incident like that of the 1783 mutiny in Philadelphia. That year, the continental militia took Congress hostage at Independence Hall demanding payment for military service, eventually prompting members of the House and Senate to seek a more secure location for the capital.<sup>11</sup> While L'Enfant's motives are disputed, his design indicates that public parks and squares were a central part of the character of the capital, intended for use by residents and visitors alike for the purpose of commemoration and political fanfare.<sup>12</sup>

Despite L'Enfant's expectations for the capital landscape, much of his design, including the manicured civic spaces, went largely unrealized for over a century. Building a capital city required hefty financial investment, and a lack of public interest in purchasing local plots influenced the immediate design of the surrounding region.<sup>13</sup> The lack of federal investment in the district was also reflective of the government's attitudes

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Since writing the Declaration of Independence proclaiming itself free from British rule, the makeshift government of the American colonies often met in Philadelphia – the previous capital city. Congress was often forced to meet in other cities such as Baltimore and New York to avoid the fighting of the Revolutionary War. Events of the late-eighteenth century demonstrated the need to relocate the original capital from Philadelphia to a new, secure location. In June of 1783, for example, soldiers in the Continental Militia marched to Philadelphia's Independence Hall where Congress had adjourned. The soldiers guarded the doors, keeping delegates hostage demanding payment for their service. Congress, however, was not in a position to acquiesce to their demands. Governed by the Articles of Confederation, the makeshift government did not have the power to tax the colonies and raise the funds needed to pay soldiers. Kenneth R. Bowling, a historian and co-editor of George Washington University's First Federal Congress Project, noted that the forceful actions of the Continental Army "convinced some Americans of the necessity of Congress having exclusive jurisdiction over any place which eventually became the permanent capital of the new country." Kenneth R. Bowling, "New Light on the Philadelphia Mutiny of 1783: Federal-State Confrontation at the Close of the War for Independence," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 101, no. 4 (Oct, 1977): pp. 419-450, 420.

<sup>13</sup> The first public auction of lots in DC took place in 1791 and commissioners only sold 35 of 10,000 lots. Young, *The Washington Community*, 20.

toward self-rule. In the decades after the American Revolution, the founding fathers and their successors struggled to find a balance between federal authority and that of the states. The hesitancy to assert federal authority was evident in the landscape of the District of Columbia as a lack of oversight resulted in the proliferation of blighted areas throughout the city. Instead, grounds and existing monuments “were in effect localized, the product of special constituencies rather than mass national campaigns or federally sponsored programs.”<sup>14</sup> While L’Enfant expressed a vision for a federal landscape, unified by symbols of national significance, Congress did not embrace its authority until later after the Civil War.

Even by the mid-nineteenth century, Washington lacked much of the infrastructure L’Enfant had envisioned. Socialite Margaret Bayard Smith chronicled her experience living in Washington from 1800-1844 in her memoirs and correspondences, describing topography of Washington, DC.<sup>15</sup> A personal friend to presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, Smith attended and later described how public grounds, specifically those near the Capitol Building, were often used to host elite social gatherings and parties. Smith also expressed a love for the undeveloped landscape of the city which she believed was “deformed” by further development and deforestation. Her accounts reveal the federal government’s reactionary response in developing the city – Congress was hesitant to spend money on infrastructure, funding projects only when deemed necessary. One of the early projects Congress did invest in was the creation of a

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<sup>14</sup> Savage, *Monument Wars*, 78.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *First Forty Years of Washington Society: Portrayed by the Family Letters of Mrs. Samuel Harrison Smith (Margaret Bayard) from the Collection of Her Grandson J. Henley Smith* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1906).

canal along the northern edge of the Mall (now Constitution Avenue) in 1810. Unlike L'Enfant's plan for a series of elegant waterways through the city, the canal soon became a holding for stagnant water and sewage.<sup>16</sup> Filled in decades later, the canal indicated the haphazard implementation of public works that characterized the capital up through the late nineteenth century. The federal government's unwillingness to invest in development projects hindered the city's growth and caused Americans to question the validity of Washington as a viable capital.

When it was first founded, the District of Columbia was home to 3,210 residents, and by 1820, the population grew to 13,247. Despite the modest growth, the city still felt like a disjointed city with "islands of buildings" spread out over miles. While a number of structures were built on Capitol Hill, in the Navy Yard along the Anacostia River, and around the White House, much of the remaining landscape existed in a semi-natural state.<sup>17</sup> By middle of the nineteenth century, residents and visitors alike desired a more refined feel for the capital. Local newspapers reported that while residents harbored mixed opinions about cultivating natural greenery in the city's communal squares, there was a consensus that major infrastructural development was needed to give the region legitimacy as the nation's capital.<sup>18</sup> Many of the public parks (including the National Mall) served as communal trash dumps with livestock roaming unchecked. With little-to-no money for the improvement of the infrastructure, major transportation arteries like

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<sup>16</sup> *Records of the Columbia Historical Society*, Vol. 7 (Washington, DC: Columbia Historical Society, 1904), 142; Reys, *Washington on View*, 54. See note below

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>18</sup> "The Capitol Grounds," *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 7, 1852; "Seats in President's and Capitol Grounds," *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 21, 1852.

Pennsylvania Avenue “remained at times impassable by carriage or foot.”<sup>19</sup> L’Enfant’s “Grand Avenue” was nothing more than fields of mud and weeds that “stretch[ed] formlessly toward the Potomac.”<sup>20</sup>

According to local historian John Clagett Proctor, “the first real awakening in caring for these grounds did not come until after Congress had conveyed to the Smithsonian Institution the south side” of the Mall between present day Ninth and Twelfth Streets.<sup>21</sup> The establishment of the Smithsonian Institution was a landmark moment in the geographical development of the capital. Not only did it symbolize intellectual investment in the city; it was one of the earliest and most notable structures on the Mall, informing the cultivation of the landscape in the coming decades. Clagett claimed that after the cornerstone of the Castle was laid in 1847, the public became more invested in the beautification of the Mall. In anticipation of the completion of the Smithsonian Castle, President Millard Fillmore invited notable horticulturalist Andrew Jackson Downing to “create a worthy landscape setting for the President’s House as well as for the Washington Monument and Smithsonian Institution”.<sup>22</sup> Downing’s design differed drastically from L’Enfant’s as he intended to “transform the entire Mall into . . . a ‘public museum of living trees and shrubs’.”<sup>23</sup> He sought to create a seemingly natural

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<sup>19</sup> Savage, *Monument Wars*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Reys, *Washington on View*, 58.

<sup>21</sup> John Clagett Proctor, “The Tragic Death of Andrew Jackson Downing and the Monument to His Memory,” *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 27 (1925): 248-61, 250.

<sup>22</sup> Savage, *Monument Wars*, 66-67.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, quoted in Savage, *Monument Wars*, 67.

landscape with tree-lined paths that was meticulously cultivated to bring visitors enjoyment, thus “strengthening . . . patriotism, and making [one] a better citizen”<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to L’Enfant’s plan to reinforce the presence of federal authority by designing landscapes around symbolic structures such as the White House and Capitol Building, Downing used curved lines in his landscaping as he believed the effect more closely mimicked the natural world. Unlike L’Enfant, he perceived “the straight or level line” as representing “the result of destructive violence . . . often, the violent subjugation of nature by man.”<sup>25</sup> Downing’s proposed design made the Smithsonian Institution the focus of the capital city.<sup>26</sup> Instead of bringing the federal structures to the forefront of the stroller’s gaze, Downing’s design was intended to evoke a sense of peace and oneness with nature. He planned gardens around the White House, Capitol Building, and Washington Monument with the most extensive park featuring winding pathways framing the Smithsonian Castle.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Downing authored several publications about landscape architecture in which he provided instruction to those looking to cultivate beautiful garden scenery, specifically that of sprawling rural estates. His writing provides insight into the value elite Americans in the mid-nineteenth century placed on the natural setting. While grounds beautification was an intensely laborious process, one closely controlled by man, the resulting landscapes were intended to mimic the best and most beautiful aspects of the natural world. Downing’s vision for the Mall, a series of gardens with winding paths shaded by the canopy of a multitude of trees, reflected his dedication to meticulously designed “natural” spaces. The garden paths were intended to lead visitors in a series of circles, mimicking a walk through a secluded forest, making the space seem much more expansive than it actually was. The horticulturalist’s gardens were intended to serve as a rural escape for city-dwellers with all the comforts of home. Downing theorized that man could “improve” public grounds by controlling and mimicking nature for the enjoyment of the people. Andrew Jackson Downing and Henry Winthrop Sargent, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening, Adapted to North America; With a View to the Improvement of Country Residences* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1844), viii.

<sup>25</sup> Savage, *Monument Wars*, 72.

<sup>26</sup> Proctor, “The Tragic Death of Andrew Jackson Downing,” 252.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Twombly (ed.), *Andrew Jackson Downing: Essential Texts* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012). As construction began on the Smithsonian Castle, Congress turned its attention to erecting a monument to America’s first president. Proposed in the 1780s, the monument to George Washington was not officially authorized by Congress until 1848. A key feature of L’Enfant’s original design, the monument was intended to mark the spot where the axis of the White House and Capitol Building intersected, serving as an iconic national symbol. The monument also featured prominently into

Despite the updated plan to the landscape at the core of the city, little was implemented due to Downing's untimely death in 1852.<sup>28</sup> The outbreak of the Civil War less than a decade later also hindered major improvements to the landscape. Reallocating funds to the war effort, Congress suspended all landscaping projects except for the construction of 68 forts around the Washington, DC area to protect the federal government from attack by Confederate forces.<sup>29</sup> Downing implemented his design for grounds immediately surrounding the Smithsonian and White House, yet the remaining space was left unkempt after his death. As a result, the newly founded museum was disjointed from the rest of the city. Scholars who have written on the history of the National Mall, including Kirk Savage and Lisa Benton-Short, note the efforts that went in to rehabilitating the space beginning in the late-nineteenth century. While an iconic landscape today, the National Mall was an unpleasant and even dangerous place to visit during the early-to-mid nineteenth century. In addition to a slaughterhouse located near the incomplete Washington Monument, the grounds between the monument, the White House, and Pennsylvania Avenue (now Federal Triangle) were christened "murderer's row" as it became a haven for "deserters and derelicts." As a result, in the late 1860s, DC reflected the effects of what Benton-Short identified as "careless development."<sup>30</sup>

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Downing's redesign, yet he sought to decenter it from a national context. His design depicted tall trees around the monument, deemphasizing the height of the towering obelisk to bring the public's attention back to the gardens. Savage, *Monument Wars*, 75-6. The monument, however, remained unfinished for another four decades due to a lack of financial backing and the outbreak of the Civil War. It became a tangible symbol of the capital city's stagnating progress through the late nineteenth century. Repp, *Washington on View*, 89-90.

<sup>28</sup> Downing was killed in a steamboat accident in 1852. Proctor, "The Tragic Death of Andrew Jackson Downing."

<sup>29</sup> Benton-Short, *The National Mall*, 54-55; Savage, *Monument Wars*, 96.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

The war also led to an increase in the city's population, and little effort was made to accommodate the growing number of residents. Areas like Federal Triangle became home to some of the city's most over-crowded and under-developed areas.<sup>31</sup> The disjointedness of the terrain coupled with ongoing building projects (specifically the Washington Monument and Capitol dome) also gave the city an unfinished feel, and in the words of Scottish journalist Alexander Mackay, the capital had "no visible centre – no one point upon which converge[d] the ideas of its inhabitants."<sup>32</sup> The lack of federal center prevented active civic use of the city's parks and squares. Instead of the meaningful gathering and recreational spaces in L'Enfant's plan, public grounds were often the picture of neglect and poor planning. Without explicit connection to federal buildings (and thus federal authority), they lacked the power and symbolism they embody today.

After the war, Washington experienced a "metamorphosis" in terms of population growth and infrastructure development. The number of residents increased from 48,000 in 1860 to 131,500 by the next decade. As the Union emerged victorious from the Civil War, the federal government was empowered to take a more active role in overseeing public land both locally and nationally.<sup>33</sup> Public historian Denise Meringolo, surmises that the lawmakers in Washington were originally hesitant to exert too much influence over states, and as a result, "Congress had been slow to create an agency or bureau it perceived as dictating a national culture."<sup>34</sup> Before the mid-nineteenth century, federal

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<sup>31</sup> Reps, *Washington on View*, 149.

<sup>32</sup> Alexander Mackay quoted in Reps, *Washington on View*, 94.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>34</sup> Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 27.

officials took little interest in overseeing public land. According to environmental historian Thomas Cox, due to this disinterest, “the two major purposes of public land legislation in the United States were to raise money for the government and to encourage settlement of the frontier.”<sup>35</sup>

By the late-nineteenth century, the federal government began investing more in the oversight of public lands as it established, according to Meringolo, “federal regulations, scientific programs, and data-gathering agencies,” that allowed it to take an active part “not simply [in] identifying the nation’s resources, but also for managing them.”<sup>36</sup> Such intervention was necessary as businessmen and entrepreneurs built resorts and other tourist attractions in popular destinations such as the Grand Canyon. The increased federal oversight over public land use can be seen in the creation of the country’s first national parks, including the establishment of Yellowstone National Park in 1872. While public lands had in the past been set aside “for public use, resort, and recreation,” the creation of Yellowstone marked a pivotal turning point in government involvement in regulating public lands.<sup>37</sup> As geographer Lary M. Dilsaver noted, Yellowstone’s establishment signified “the first serious challenge to the culture of land alienation and consumptive use in American history.”<sup>38</sup> Other scholars such as geographer Lisa Benton-Short argue that the legislation setting aside the first National

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas R. Cox, “Americans and Their Forests: Romanticism, Progress, and Science in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Forest History* 29, No. 4 (Oct., 1985), pp. 156-168,160.

<sup>36</sup> Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Before the creation of the first National Park, Congress set aside a small portion of the Yosemite Valley to be cared for by the state of California. The park was later incorporated as part of the National Park Service. Cited in “An Act Authorizing A Grant to the State of California of the ‘Yo-Semite Valley,’ and of the Land Embracing the ‘Mariposa Big Tree Grove,’” Approved June 30, 1864 (13 Stat. 325) in *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents*, edited by Lary M. Dilsaver (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

Parks for the purpose of public recreation and enjoyment established a precedent for “public use and public space” in American rhetoric.<sup>39</sup> The National Park was protected from encroaching settlement and the railroads, and responsibility for its care and preservation fell to the Secretary of the Interior.<sup>40</sup> In the last years of the nineteenth century, Congress created several new National Parks and passed legislation protecting Casa Grande, located in Arizona. But several decades passed before the government created a bureaucracy sufficient to care for these natural landscapes.<sup>41</sup>

The government’s desire to regulate public land use can also be seen in the management of Washington, DC’s recreation spaces. Before the mid-nineteenth century, land in the federal district was overseen by a superintendent, a position designated by President George Washington in 1790. When Congress established the Department of Interior (DOI) in 1849, the secretary and the Office of Commission of Public Buildings assumed responsibility over federal land in the capital.<sup>42</sup> In March of 1867 Congress attempted to address the much needed city improvements by transferring responsibility of “all the public works and improvements of the government of the United States in the District of Columbia” from the Department of Interior (overseen by a civilian commissioner) to the War Department, specifically the Army Corps of Engineers, creating the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. As a result of the restructuring, the Chief Engineer General A. A. Humphreys assigned Major Nathaniel Michler to manage public land in the district. Michler and his successors played a critical role in shaping the

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<sup>39</sup> Benton-Short, *The National Mall*: 7.

<sup>40</sup> Macintosh, *Shaping the System*, 10-11.

<sup>41</sup> Dilsaver, “An Act to Establish A National Park Service, and for Other Purposes,” Approved Aug 25, 1916 (30 Stat. 535) in *America’s National Park System*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Benton-Short, *The National Mall*, 77.

modern landscape of Washington, DC as the Army Corps of Engineers oversaw civic spaces in the capital through the early-to-mid twentieth century until the National Park Service, an agency within the Department of Interior, assumed responsibility.<sup>43</sup> Michler's tenure in overseeing urban development was critical as he submitted annual reports about the state of public grounds in Washington with recommended improvements, establishing a trajectory for development for the next half-century.

Michler's assessment of federal lands in Washington, DC is notable as it was the first attempt to thoroughly assess federal property in the district since L'Enfant's original survey. The annual reports called attention to the neglected state of the city's recreational spaces and the recommendations reflected the district's potential according to Michler's vision. His reports were also important in making an argument for maintaining Washington as the seat of the federal government after several states petitioned Congress in 1869 to reestablish the capitol in the west. Opposed to such a plan, Michler argued that Washington's parks and squares were unique to the city and an essential part of the capital as they were specifically intended for "the benefit of citizens."<sup>44</sup> While some of the public parks he referenced were already implemented according to L'Enfant's original design (including Lafayette Square across from the White House), many needed additional care and maintenance.<sup>45</sup> Michler was a proponent of maintaining public

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<sup>43</sup> Pamela Scott, *Capital Engineers: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the Development of Washington, D.C., 1790-2004* (Alexandria, VA: Office of History, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 2011), 71-5.

<sup>44</sup> Reys, *Washington on View*, 152.

<sup>45</sup> In 1853, the equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson in Lafayette Square was unique as it was the first monument in the capital not located next to federal structure. This park was the first landscape to be realized in L'Enfant's vision and architectural historian Kirk Savage argues that the erection of the statue was "the model of the commemorative landscape to come." Savage, *Monument Wars*, 80.

grounds as they “afford[ed] for both rich and poor the means of enjoyment.”<sup>46</sup> He advocated for further development of prominent areas like the National Mall and suggested adding improvements such as lakes and fountains throughout city squares.

Michler’s assignment ended in 1871, yet his reports played a critical role in informing a new era of public works ushered in by Alexander Shepherd, a local businessman and politician who was appointed to head the newly restructured local government of Washington, DC. While residents of the district originally elected their local officials, city leaders worked with Congress to restructure the local government. With greater federal oversight, members of the community believed they would qualify for more funding to finance much needed public projects.<sup>47</sup> Finding the money to pay for large-scale development was a challenge that Michler had also encountered, and this lack of funding prevented him from addressing many of the improvements outlined in his reports.

The new local government, composed of a board led by Shepherd, was responsible for implementing repairs of public buildings and landscapes and addressing infrastructure projects. Shepherd’s plan for updating the city included paving roads, building sewers, and beautifying public parks and recreation spaces.<sup>48</sup> Over the next few years, he and his board spent an astounding \$16 million on city improvements. As local and federal officials became wary of the accumulating debt, Congress opened an official investigation. While Congress did not have enough evidence to prove that Shepherd

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<sup>46</sup> Major Nathaniel Michler quoted in Reys, *Washington on View*, 153.

<sup>47</sup> As a result of the reorganization, the federal government gained more control over how to run the District. In subsequent years, federal officials took control of the electorate process, appointing local leaders instead of allowing residents to exercise their suffrage rights.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

illegally profited from the projects, they abolished the local government and set up a three-member Board of Commissioners appointed by the president.<sup>49</sup> This form of government stripped Washington, DC residents of voting rights, yet it benefited the Army Corps of Engineers and their ability to influence change to the capital's public grounds. The Board of Commissioners was comprised of two members appointed by the president as well as the Chief of Engineers, who usually held the most power of the three. With greater federal authority of land management both in Washington and nationwide, the topography and symbolism of the capital changed over the course of the next century. Landscaping trends of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century influenced the beautification of Washington, DC's public spaces, implementing the framework for the modern-day National Mall.

### **The Twentieth-Century Landscape**

The twentieth century ushered in a new era for the United States and specifically the District of Columbia as wealth disparity increased and as social reform movements proliferated, resulting in new forms of protest using symbolic and politically charged spaces.<sup>50</sup> This period in American history is noted for its “wrenching social changes accompanied by the rise of the large-scale economic organization...know[n] as

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<sup>49</sup> Residents of Washington, DC had previously lost many of their rights in 1871 when Shepherd took charge, including the right to vote. At the time, the federal government only recognized voting rights of white and Black men as (most) women were denied enfranchisement until 1920. While wealthy white members of the district had the capital and status to access and influence members of the commission government, African American and working-class men did not, leaving them with little say in how the local government was run. Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle for Equality in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> George W. Ruiz, “The Ideological Convergence of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 19, No. 1 (Winter, 1989): 159-177, 160.

industrialism,” a phenomenon that altered class-relations and caused widespread civil unrest.<sup>51</sup> One of the most notable effects of industrialization was poverty; businesses exploited workers, resulting in the explosion of slums and tenements in urban centers. In response to the growing wealth disparity, journalists and humanitarians such as Jacob Riis and Upton Sinclair exposed the deplorable working and living of the poor and caught the attention of middle and upper-class Americans.

According to economist and social psychologist Samuel P. Hayes, affluent citizens became concerned with the effects of industrialization and urbanization for several reasons; they were unsettled by what they perceived to be a fundamental shift in American values and behavior, and they felt that addressing the rampant poverty would quell growing civil unrest.<sup>52</sup> Progressivism, what historian George Ruiz has called “an urban reaction to the excesses of unrestrained laissez-faire capitalism, rapid urbanization, and industrialization,” addressed societal problems by reforming and uplifting poorer citizens through increased government regulation, job training, and education.<sup>53</sup> This movement often consisted of affluent Americans imposing their perceptions of appropriate behavior and values on lower class citizens. The Progressive Movement’s call for social and moral uplift often included designing recreational spaces where people could be free of the gloomy, tightly packed tenements. Known as the City Beautiful Movement, this social phenomenon had roots in European landscaping tradition, but

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<sup>51</sup> Samuel P. Hayes, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 92-93.

<sup>53</sup> Ruiz, “The Ideological Convergence of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson,” 159.

when implemented in American became associated with the Progressive Movement.<sup>54</sup> Fueled by the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the City Beautiful Movement attempted to unify various aspects of city design, including building architecture, grounds beautification, monument placement. Proponents of the movement sought to create "a harmonious design" where "the beauty of the whole [was] superior to that of each of the several parts of the composition exploited separately."<sup>55</sup>

As these social reform movements coalesced in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Washington, DC was finally emerging as a viable metropolis. The notion of reforming the district's lower-class residents took hold. While the housing in Washington, DC was reportedly "much more wholesome than the mammoth, crowded tenements of New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Baltimore", reformers like Charles Frederick Weller called for better housing conditions and improvements to shared public spaces in the district.<sup>56</sup> Weller compiled a book of "stories" that he thought would shed light on the dire state of poverty in the district. He visited impoverished neighborhoods throughout the city and made suggestions for how to improve living conditions, including delegating some of the District Commission's authority to a local City Council that would be "in close touch with the city's needs".<sup>57</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, elected in 1901,

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas S. Hines, "The Imperial Mall: The City Beautiful Movement and the Washington Plan of 1901-1902," *Studies in the History of Art* 30, (1991): 78-99.

<sup>55</sup> Daniel Burnham, "White City and Capital City," *Century Illustrated Magazine* (February 1902), 619.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Frederick Weller, *Neglected Neighborhoods: Stories of Life in the Allies, Tenements and Shanties of the National Capital* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1909), 20.

<sup>57</sup> Weller implies that Congress and the President were too busy "with [their] multitudinous tasks of national scope," to effectively address the needs of local residents in the district. He theorized that by relinquishing some authority to local leaders, Congress could help facilitate better city infrastructure. *Ibid.*, 315.

responded to Weller's call to address the state of the district, and Roosevelt agreed that Washington should serve as "a model city."<sup>58</sup>

Roosevelt was a progressive leader looking to reform big business, address the rampant poverty, and beautify the capital city. He commissioned a study on the housing and health conditions in the District of Columbia in order to better understand the state of public and private housing with the intention of replacing some of the more dilapidated structures. Roosevelt's efforts to address housing in the region coincided with an effort by Congress to beautify the public grounds of the city. The Senate and House of Representatives established a committee to draft a plan for the redesign of the capital's parks and squares. Led by Senator James McMillan of Michigan, the committee spent several years creating the McMillan Plan, a "comprehensive plan for the development of the entire park system in the District of Columbia", that in many ways revived L'Enfant's original design.<sup>59</sup>

While authoring the report, the committee invited distinguished architects and artists to provide guidance, including Daniel Burnham, Director of Works of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, noted sculptor Augustus St. Gaudens, and landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.<sup>60</sup> The plan proposed the creation of several additional parks throughout the city, yet the committee believed the implementation of these new public spaces "...call[ed] for a study of connections among the parks, so as to bring into one system the diversified attraction which these public spaces [would] offer

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Charles Moore (ed.), *The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia*, U.S. Congress, Senate, Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, 57<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (1902), S. Rep. 166, 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

when adequately developed.”<sup>61</sup> This approach differed drastically from how public land was perceived and allotted in the previous century. Once disconnected parks that were maintained independently of each other, the McMillan Commission proposed a unified capital landscape that connected federal buildings and highlighted prominent monuments and memorials (more in line with L’Enfant’s design than Downing’s). The committee’s primary objective was to redesign the capital landscape into “a work of civic art” that functioned as a “single well-considered system.”<sup>62</sup>

As the committee drafted their report, Congress enacted the 1898 “Act to vest in the Commissioners of the District of Columbia control of street parking in said District.” While the Army Corps of Engineers already had authority over the district’s public lands, this act more clearly defined its legal jurisdiction, assigning “All public spaces laid down as reservations on the map of eighteen hundred and ninety-four” to “the exclusive charge and control of the Chief of Engineers of the United States Army”.<sup>63</sup> The act officially gave the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds (the office under the Army Corps of Engineers) responsibility over the 301 reservations defined on the 1894 map, which eventually became the basis for the modern day park system of Washington.<sup>64</sup> The plan

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>63</sup> *An Act To vest in the Commissioners of the District of Columbia control of street parking in said District*, 55<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., (July 1, 1898).

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Barthold, “L’Enfant-McMillan Plan of Washington, DC,” in 1993 *HABS/HAER Review* (Washington, DC: Historic American Building Survey, 1993); John Stewart, John M. Wilson, and the United States Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, *Map of the City of Washington Showing the Public Reservations Under Control of Office of Public Buildings and Grounds* (Washington, DC: Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, 1894), Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division Washington, DC. <http://www.loc.gov/item/87694430/>.

was significant as it created a physical as well as symbolic connection between the land and the federal presence in the capital, facilitating the emergence of a culture of protest.

Notably absent from the 1894 map was the area across the Anacostia River. Located southeast of the federal center of the city, this area was historically underdeveloped, a spot plagued by mud and frequent flooding. While the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds built and replaced a series of bridges across the Anacostia in the late-nineteenth century, the area was still underdeveloped. In the early 1900s, Weller also wrote about this section of the city, describing it as sparsely populated and prone to flooding. He categorized this region as one of the “plague spots” of the city.<sup>65</sup> Weller agreed with the McMillan Committee’s findings that the flats included 1,100 acres that “demand[ed] reclamation, in order to free the eastern portion of the city from the malarial conditions which...constantly impaired the health of those persons...compelled to live within the miasmal influences.”<sup>66</sup>

Part of the McMillan Plan entailed rehabilitating the Anacostia Flats, located on the south side of the river. Despite the commission’s optimism in reclaiming the flats, Congress did not allocate funds for development. By the 1910s, river runoff worsened the swampy condition of the Anacostia landscape, and Congress was compelled to act, designating the area Anacostia Park in 1918. Now part of the capital’s park system, Congress planned to develop the area into a water park based on McMillan report recommendations.<sup>67</sup> However by the late 1920s, little development had occurred and the

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<sup>65</sup> Weller, *Neglected Neighborhoods*, 234-241.

<sup>66</sup> Moore, *The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia*, 57<sup>th</sup> Congress, 11.

<sup>67</sup> Scott, *Capital Engineers*, 204-5.

fields of mud soon became a prime location to sequester thousands of protesting veterans, the topic of the next chapter.

Other factors, such as the creation of a unified park system, also helped to create a more symbolic federal center. The McMillan Commission believed that while Washington's small open squares had a place in nineteenth century America, "the development of urban life and the expansion of cities [had] brought into prominence the need...for large parks" to offer "spaces adapted to various special forms of recreation."<sup>68</sup> The authors of the report also noted that the Mall, once intended to be a singular landscape, had "been diverted from its original purpose and cut into fragments," preventing public buildings from having "appropriate surroundings".<sup>69</sup> The unification of the National Mall would not only provide a proper backdrop for federal life in the capital; it would also address the dire "demand for new public buildings and memorials".<sup>70</sup> The commission believed that by creating a modern park system in the capital, they were addressing the unfulfilled promise of the capital to be a place where the public buildings and seats of government were of the "first importance".<sup>71</sup>

Intentional about their plan to construct new federal buildings, the commissioners devised a framework for the placement of new structures. Thoughtful arrangement of buildings was not only a necessary aspect of city-planning, it was also a symbolic show of the relationship between the branches of government. The McMillian Plan called for new "public buildings" to face the Capitol Grounds with Department buildings under the

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<sup>68</sup> Moore, *The Improvement of the Park System of the District of Columbia*, 57<sup>th</sup> Congress, 23.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid, 23.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 25.

executive branch built around Lafayette Square in close proximity to the White House.<sup>72</sup> This arrangement was practical as it put agencies in close proximity to their respective branches of government. The plan also called for a line of public museums along the north side of the Mall intended to provide the public with easy access to cultural institutions. With this aspect of the plan, commissioners were intentionally transforming the National Mall into a public gathering space where citizens could find both recreation and education. The space between the Mall and Pennsylvania Avenue, now referred to as Federal Triangle, was envisioned as a neighborhood for buildings that enhanced life in the capital, including a “Hall of Records,” a public market, and an armory for the city.<sup>73</sup>

The commission felt strongly that the infrastructure of the capital should conform with L’Enfant’s vision, and they interpreted the placement of buildings such as the Library of Congress as a “perpetual mutilation of L’Enfant’s plan”. Built overtop of Pennsylvania Avenue, obstructing the view of the Capitol from the east, the Library of Congress (in the commission’s opinion) “inflict[ed] incalculable injury to the Capitol.”<sup>74</sup> They argued that it was the lines of site between the Capitol and White House gave “Washington its unique advantage over all other American cities.”<sup>75</sup> In addition to emphasizing the importance of making buildings of authority visible throughout the city, the commission intended to use the Mall as the “park-like means of communication between the legislative and the executive departments.”<sup>76</sup> The design of the Mall as

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 28-9.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 43.

depicted in the McMillan Plan used the monumental core of the city to reinforce national symbols, unifying them as part of a larger power structure.

Burnham, St. Gaudens, Olmsted, and others recognized that their vision for redesigning Washington, DC was a “stupendous” task, “much greater than any one generation [could] hope to accomplish.”<sup>77</sup> While the plan was released in 1902, it took decades to implement. Its completion transformed the way the public interacted with the landscape of the capital city. The McMillan Plan created a nationally significant landscape that became the blueprint for the modern-day capital, symbolizing a “revolutionary transformation of Washington into the capital of an emerging world power.”<sup>78</sup>

Increased federal oversight over the stewardship of capital parks endowed the landscape with a unique significance, especially as the McMillan Plan reinforced symbols of legislative and executive power. But the federal government’s increasing control over the city’s civic spaces also had local implications. Benton-Short implies that the lack of local stakeholder participation in regulating the district’s public gathering spaces facilitated the continued mismanagement of public land. She does, however, concede that federal control over the city’s parks and recreation areas gave the capital greater national significance. Drawing on the work of political scientists, geographers, and historians who have extensively studied the use of public space, Benton-Short surmises that due to urbanization, public parks and squares take on “multiple roles as places of increasing political, social, and economic importance.”<sup>79</sup> With the population growth and

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>78</sup> Scott, *Capital Engineers*, 133-134.

<sup>79</sup> Benton-Short, *The National Mall*, 5.

development of Washington, DC in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, public parks became important gathering spaces and, eventually, places of protest.

### **Early Protests**

Today, political protests are part of the culture of Washington, and they serve as a mechanism for exercising rights guaranteed in the Constitution, including the freedom of speech and right to assemble. The origins of this civic tradition began in 1894 with a demonstration organized by Ohio businessman Jacob Coxey and cattle rancher Carl Browne. In response to the economic depression of 1893, Coxey and Browne led a cohort of unemployed workers to the capital in what historian Lucy G. Barber refers to as “the first real march on Washington.”<sup>80</sup> Supporters of Coxey and Brown’s proposed demonstration (referred to as Coxey’s Army) gathered in cities across the country, bound for Washington, DC. Coxey planned to lead followers down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol Building where they would hand Congress the Good Roads Bill. The symbolic gesture was intended to spur Congress to pass the bill to hire unemployed American to build roads across the country.<sup>81</sup> Browne, the impetus behind the protest, considered the traditional and more private method of lobbying Congress through postal exchange ineffective. Instead of mailing the bill, allowing congressional representatives to quietly ignore it, Browne suggested a “petition in boots.” Demonstrators would physically deliver the bill to Congress as part of a public parade, forcing elected officials to acknowledge the poverty that plagued their constituents.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 11.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 11-17.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

Bringing their plight to Washington, Coxey and Browne gained national attention as members of the press followed demonstrators on their journey from Coxey's hometown of Massillon, Ohio to the capital. Their departure from political norms attracted media coverage from across the country. But most news reports either mocked or derided demonstrators, depicting them as drunkards and tramps.<sup>83</sup> This tactic of framing poor, unemployed Americans as "degenerate" members of society was so effective that media outlets and public officials continued to use this strategy to delegitimize demonstrations for ensuing decades.<sup>84</sup> Coxey and Brown found little support from reporters, and even newspapers that typically supported workers' rights denounced the demonstration.<sup>85</sup> Barber claims that participants firmly believed in the potential success of direct appeal due to previous "working-class agitation at the local level."<sup>86</sup>

Officials in Washington, however, were wary of the "petition in boots" that marched down Pennsylvania Avenue on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1894. Political scientist Jerry Prout notes that when Coxey and his men began their march down the avenue, it "had yet to become the sort of public space that attracted protest parades" as it was a popular shopping district and major transportation artery.<sup>87</sup> The street did have national significance as it was the route newly inaugurated presidents traveled from the Capitol Building to the White House, yet it was not associated with acts of protest. The

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 20-22, 43.

<sup>84</sup> Barber describes how media outlets framed bonus marchers as "tramps" instead of employed Americans seeking work. Playing on public fears, media outlets obscured the demonstrators' goals of pressuring Congress to enact legislation funding new jobs. Ibid, 19-21.

<sup>85</sup> Dmitri Palmateer, "Charity and the 'Tramp': Itinerancy, Unemployment, and Municipal Government from Coxey to the Unemployed League," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 107, no. 2 (Summer, 2006): 228-253, 234.

<sup>86</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 25.

<sup>87</sup> Jerry Prout, "Hope, Fear, and Confusion: Coxey's Arrival in Washington," *Washington History* 25 (Summer 2013): 1-19, 1.

procession of unemployed Americans down Pennsylvania Avenue established a precedent and “invent[ed] a new form of political expression.”<sup>88</sup>

While a defining moment in the history of American protest, Coxey’s Army was considered a failure due in part to the demonstrators’ inability to lobby congressional representative about their proposed bill. Members of Congress collaborated with the Washington, DC Metropolitan Police Department to curtail access to the Capitol Grounds to those they considered “illegitimate” and unworthy – specifically Coxey’s band of impoverished Americans who sought to engage with their elected leaders.<sup>89</sup> Citing the 1882 “Act to Regulate the Use of the Capitol Grounds”, law enforcement had legal grounds to arrest protesters who stepped on the property as the law forbade citizens from using the grounds to “parade, stand or move in procession or assemblages.”<sup>90</sup> While the law stated that the green space surrounding the Capitol was “formed to subserve the quiet and dignity of the Capitol of the United States,” it was rarely enforced. The prospect of arrest did not deter Coxey or his fellow demonstrators as they believed they were entitled to confront their elected officials due to their standing as citizens. Though unemployed due to the Depression, they wanted to work for money, not accept charity. They saw their demands for the bonus not as a request for federal welfare, but a demand for wages earned from their service.<sup>91</sup> They mistakenly believed federal officials would not only acknowledge their claims, but pass legislation in their favor. When Coxey attempted to walk up the Capitol steps to deliver a speech, he was detained. Browne and another

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<sup>88</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 18.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>90</sup> *An Act to Regulate the Use of Capitol Grounds*, S. 789, 47<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (July 1, 1882).

<sup>91</sup> Dmitri Palmateer. “Charity and the ‘Tramp,’” 239.

demonstrator succeeded in jumping the fence surrounding the grounds and were violently arrested by club-wielding officers.<sup>92</sup>

Coxey and Browne attempted to reenergize demonstrators after they were released from prison but made little progress. The collusion of local and federal officials in using respectability politics to curtail access to public land set a dangerous precedent. Coxey and Browne's arrests signaled that rarely enforced legislation could be weaponized against citizens to prevent them from accessing civic spaces. With local police arresting demonstrators, Congress avoided the potentially embarrassing scene of acknowledging and interacting with demonstrators. Shirking culpability, members of Congress set a standard for how federal officials could leverage their power and influence to recruit local law enforcement to engage with protesters, leaving their image untarnished.

Coxey and Browne, however, believed they not only had the right to petition the government; according to Barber, the men believed they "had an obligation to go to the capital if that is what it took to improve the country."<sup>93</sup> From the start of the demonstration, the men framed it as a divine pilgrimage, departing Ohio on Easter Sunday. They further emphasized the religious connotations of the march to Washington by christening their group the Commonwealth of Christ, believing "that going to the capital itself was within the right and indeed responsibilities of American citizens."<sup>94</sup> By claiming their right to publicly engage with federal officials, Coxey and Browne

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<sup>92</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 34-38.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

articulated the foundational rhetoric that inspired a culture of civil disobedience for generations to come.

Using Pennsylvania Avenue as the staging ground for the march and attempting to address the public on the steps of the Capitol, Coxey and his fellow demonstrators sowed the seeds for future public protests. Less than two decades later, women suffragists adopted a similar method to pressure the government by holding a Woman Suffrage Parade in 1913; yet as Barber notes, the women sought to prove “that Washington demonstrations could be both dramatic and respectable.”<sup>95</sup> Organized by Lucy Burns and Dr. Alice Paul, a New Jersey Quaker who spent the several years fighting for suffrage in Britain with the more militant suffragettes, the parade was an attempt to upstage the newly elected President Woodrow Wilson the day before his inauguration. The suffrage parade not intended to confront government officials, instead it was a way to “co-opt” the authority of the federal government to press for a federal amendment to the Constitution recognizing women’s suffrage. Barber claims that that the “1913 suffrage procession helped establish Washington as a public national space,” due in part to the parade’s procession down one of the most symbolic roadways in the nation – Pennsylvania Avenue. The demonstration also drew from earlier suffrage parades taking place across the country, parades that were evidence of the revitalizing movement for women’s suffrage.

The impetus for an organized effort to demand women’s rights began at the first Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Organized by Elizabeth

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 45.

Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Mary Ann M'Clintock, and Jane Hunt, the convention was attended by over three hundred women and men, with one hundred signing the Declaration of Sentiments. Drafted by the organizers and modeled after the *Declaration of Independence*, the *Declaration of Sentiments* listed the rights women believed they were entitled to, including the right to vote. In the decades that followed, women mobilized across the country to fight for suffrage rights, but these efforts often aimed at establishing suffrage at the local and regional level.<sup>96</sup> The movement also experienced much internal turmoil over the issue of race, and women including Stanton and Anthony were more interested in appealing to suffrage segregationists than including Black women as equal participants in the struggle for suffrage rights.<sup>97</sup>

Suffragists celebrated several victories in the late nineteenth century, including enfranchisement in the states of Colorado (1893), Utah (1895), and Idaho (1896).<sup>98</sup> Over the next decade, however, the movement stalled as gains among states faltered, with six state referendums on women's suffrage failing between 1896 and 1910.<sup>99</sup> Recognizing the need to change their tactics, suffragists began to occupy public space as a way to

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<sup>96</sup> A number of scholars have noted the suffrage movement's connection with religious revivalism, Quakerism, abolitionism, and temperance and the influence these social reform movements had in influencing American women's ideas of liberty. Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Rebels against Slavery* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967). Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).

<sup>97</sup> White women were concerned that African American women would threaten suffragists' claims to respectability, despite protests from women such as Ida B. Wells. Founder of the Alpha Suffrage Club, a Black women's club based in Chicago, Wells and other members demanded to march with their home state of Illinois. Instructed to march at the back of the parade, Wells left the procession and followed alongside until she rejoined with the group of Illinois suffragists. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 99, 122-123.

<sup>98</sup> Holly J. McCammon, "'Out of the Parlors and into the Streets': The Changing Tactical Repertoire of the U.S. Women's Suffrage Movements," *Social Forces* 81, no.3 (March 2003): pp. 787-818, 790.

<sup>99</sup> Mary Chapman, "Women and Masquerade in the 1913 Suffrage Demonstration in Washington," *American Studies* 44, no. 3 (1999): 343-355, 346.

bring the issue to a broader group of Americans. Women gave speeches about the importance of suffrage in public parks and on street corners; they also began to organize parades. While the open-air meetings “allowed women to claim public space, suffrage parades did so on a much larger scale,” exposing members of the public to the issue of women’s suffrage rights.<sup>100</sup> Professor of Law and Sociology at Vanderbilt University, Holly J. McCammon notes that by claiming public spaces, suffragists were presenting themselves as legitimate political actors, and the parades functioned as public displays that allowed the women to publicly confront elected leaders while maintaining “respectable” behavior. Until the 1913 suffrage procession down Pennsylvania Avenue, most suffrage parades were intended to pressure local and state officials to recognize women’s suffrage rights. The leading suffrage organization at the time, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), was more focused on suffrage gains on the local and state level. When Paul was put in charge of NAWSA’s congressional committee, she sought to use her position to shift the organization’s focus from securing suffrage on the state level to demanding a federal amendment to the Constitution.<sup>101</sup>

Paul and the congressional committee strategically planned the parade for March 3, 1913 – the day before Woodrow Wilson’s presidential inauguration. Women were not permitted to march in the inaugural parade, and their demonstration the day before symbolized their frustration with their marginalization from the political process. The

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<sup>100</sup> McCammon, ““Out of the Parlors and into the Streets,”” 791.

<sup>101</sup> Eventually Paul broke from the more conservative NAWSA and established the Congressional Union, which was later renamed the National Woman’s Party. “Suffragettes” refers to British women who fought for the vote, while the term “suffragists” is used to describe their American counterparts. The word “suffragettes” was often used in a derogatory context in the United States and is therefore not an appropriate term to describe American women fighting for suffrage right.

suffragists also succeeded in shifting attention from Wilson's arrival in the capital to their demands for enfranchisement. As the women marched down Pennsylvania Avenue that sunny day in early March, Wilson was stepping off a train in Union Station only a few blocks away. When asked why there was not a more robust crowd to greet him, Wilson was informed that everyone was preoccupied with the suffrage parade.<sup>102</sup>

To plan the parade, NAWSA's congressional committee had to secure permission, a task made difficult by the uncooperative District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Chief Richard Sylvester. While the suffragists got approval from the Secretary of the Treasury Franklin MacVeagh to use the steps of the Treasury Building for a women's pageant, they struggled to obtain Sylvester's support for the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue. The police chief suggested the women use Sixteenth Avenue instead, a much less symbolic route. With pressure from *The Washington Post* and even President William Howard Taft, Sylvester eventually approved the women's request, and Paul was granted permission to use the capital's public grounds.<sup>103</sup>

Not only was the parade route symbolic, the marchers' attire and demeanor were also intended to reinforce the idea that they were respectable women deserving of participation in the political process. Several suffragists rode on horseback, conjuring patriotic symbols of military parades. The optics of Inez Milholland, a well-known suffragist and activist, clothed in a white cape and crown leading the procession on a white horse, conveyed powerful patriotic meaning. Independent scholar Susan Ware claims that this tactic was effective as the image of "women confidently riding horses like military

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<sup>102</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 55.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

leaders made a powerful political statement.”<sup>104</sup> In addition to women on horseback, other participants dressed all in white to reinforce notions of respectability and beauty. The dignified procession was intended to convince male onlookers that women were equally worthy of participation in civic life.

During the parade, women were harassed by crowds of men who insulted and even physically assaulted demonstrators. The police force did little to intervene, causing Congress to open an official inquiry into the events. Instead of allowing the outbursts of violence to be used as evidence that women should stay out of the public sphere, Paul framed the men’s behavior as an excuse for women to be more involved in politics. She reasoned that women should not only be involved in public life, but in charge of it as they at least behaved with a level of decorum, unlike the male spectators. The Senate Committee tasked with investigating the violence that took place during the parade concluded that there needed to be more control over city during protests, a decision that supported further federal control over the district.<sup>105</sup> Paul’s parade succeeded in attraction nation-wide interest in women’s suffrage, yet it would take another seven years for the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment recognizing women’s suffrage rights.

The 1913 suffrage parade helped solidify the capital city as a place of protests where demonstrators could get the attention of local leaders while capturing the attention of the public. It also prompted Congress to ensure greater federal control over the district “to ensure that that the authorities had as much power as possible to determine the form

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<sup>104</sup> Susan Ware, *Why They Marched: Untold Stories of the Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 124.

<sup>105</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 70-71.

and timing of a demonstration.”<sup>106</sup> As Congress tried to solidify greater control over the city in the decades to come, World War I veterans marching on the capital in the summer of 1932 challenged this authority. As the men sought to have their war bonuses paid early, their spontaneous and grassroots approach to confronting the government presented unprecedented challenges to Congress and President Herbert Hoover. The veterans’ extended presence in the capital, specifically in Anacostia Park, changed the meaning of protest as it was single display of protest. A critical aspect of their demonstration included a prolonged stay in the capital, specifically in the city’s parks, and they attempted to trying to use their physical presence as a way to make demands. the Bonus Army was also unique due to it inclusive policies, its grassroots origins, and its unprecedented size. As one of the first mass demonstration in American history, it changed the way Americans perceived public protest as veterans used their bodies to physically occupy federal space to make apolitical statement. Its legacy continued to influence how protest was practiced in public space in the capital for decades to come.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 71.

### CHAPTER III: THE BONUS ARMY MARCH AND WORLD WAR I VETERANS' OCCUPATION OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

In May of 1932, at the height of the Great Depression, thousands of World War I veterans marched to the nation's capital in what is remembered as the Bonus Army demonstration. With their military service over a decade behind them, the men were still waiting on the federal government to pay them their promised adjusted compensation. While this compensation was technically a form of life insurance (payable in 1945 or in the case of a veteran's death), it became known as the "bonus". By the early 1930s, as America faced growing political, social, and economic concerns, veterans felt entitled to the money due to the worsening depression and they showed their frustration by marching to Washington, DC. Due to their quest for compensation, known publicly as the "bonus", the group of protesting veterans became known as the Bonus Army or the Bonus Expeditionary Forces (B.E.F.).<sup>1</sup> The demonstrators, untrained in political lobbying and grassroots organizing, spent almost eight-weeks in the capital making claims about their rights as citizens and redefining the process for publicly expressing political dissent.<sup>2</sup> They demanded pre-payment of the bonus by holding parades, by lobbying, and by occupying the city for the duration of the summer; but leaders of the demonstration also showed a depth of knowledge about the power of political rhetoric. Veterans seized

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen, *The Bonus Army: An American Epic* (New York: Walker and Company, 2004), 29. The group of veterans named themselves the Bonus Expeditionary Forces based on what they were called while serving in France – the American Expeditionary Forces.

<sup>2</sup> Historian Lucy G. Barber made a similar claim in her book *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition*, in which she examines significant protests spanning the late-nineteenth and twentieth century. She argued that the Bonus Army was different from previous demonstrations in that challenged popular concepts of what was deemed an acceptable form of protest. Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 85.

control of the narrative of the demonstration by establishing their own newspaper, printed and distributed in the nation's capital. Throughout the campaign, members of the Bonus Army shared their stories by creating their own news outlet, and by extension, they made demands leveraging their status as war veterans and took an active role in redefining the standards of American citizenship.

A result of lax government regulations and risky bank investments, the stock market crashed in October 1929, sending the nation into an unprecedented financial crisis. In the years that followed, many citizens were terminated from work, evicted from their homes, and left destitute. In addition to the financial crisis, the late 1920s and 1930s saw a shift in cultural values and traditions as people struggled to make sense of their identity as Americans. As the social landscape of the nation changed in response to the mass migration of African Americans to northern cities, the enfranchisement of women in 1920, and the influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, the white male population began to question and reassess what rights and privileges should be inherent in their status as citizens.<sup>3</sup> The question of who deserved citizenship and what rights were endowed in that status became an underlying factor in the social movements that arose in the wake of the Great Depression, particularly in the mobilization of the Bonus Army.

What started as a march of a few hundred men from Portland, Oregon in the summer of 1932 grew into a demonstration consisting of tens of thousands of veterans from across the country. As the Portland veterans journeyed eastward, they encountered resistance from railroad companies and local law enforcement. These confrontations

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<sup>3</sup> Peter J. P. DiNardo, "Whose America? Contesting the Meaning of America in the 1930s," *OAH Magazine of History*, 19, no. 4, (July 2005): 27-32.

drew the attention of the press, providing veterans with national media coverage that transformed the once modest protest into a national movement. Headlines across the country detailed the Bonus Army's journey to the capital, inspiring other ex-servicemen to mobilize to Washington.

National press coverage changed the trajectory of the demonstration as it helped veterans win the much needed support of the American public. Civilians across the country provided aid in a number of ways: by offering transportation to the capital and by donating supplies during the Bonus Army's eight-week encampment. Widespread approval of the demonstration and its objectives was also vital in pressuring Congress to vote in favor of the pre-payment of the bonus. Thrust into the public eye, veterans benefited from the press, yet it came with a caveat. With the nation watching, the ex-servicemen needed to prove their worth as upstanding citizens. In the early-twentieth century, many Americans clung to the antiquated misconception that poverty denoted laziness. In the aftermath of the Civil War and with the rise of industrial capitalism, poverty and homelessness, once a local problem, became a national crisis. Viewing themselves as altruistic redeemers, wealthy Americans responded by attempting to reform members of the working-class in what historians label the Progressive Era. While the Bonus Army formed over a decade after the end of the Progressive Era, this mentality continued to dictate how Americans reacted to impoverished members of society. As most Bonus marchers were out of work due the depression, they needed to disassociate their employment status with their personal values in order to prove that their poverty did

not stem from a lack of work ethic. Instead, they had to emphasize their status as former soldiers who were legally entitled to pay.<sup>4</sup>

To ensure acceptable behavior in their ranks, leaders of the demonstration enacted a strict code of conduct, requiring participants to abide by the law. Demeaning behavior such as panhandling and drinking was not tolerated. Those responsible for organizing the demonstration, including Portland veteran Walter W. Waters, lauded the moral integrity of the men of the Bonus Army whenever given a chance. In order to make a compelling case of their worth as war veterans and citizens, the Bonus Army's tactics not only included lobbying politicians and occupying the capital; it also entailed winning the hearts of average Americans through the power of story-telling.

Despite the failure of similar demonstrations in preceding decades, World War I veterans were convinced that collective action combined with widespread public support of their cause could be used as a tool to achieve their demands.<sup>5</sup> What ensued was a complex movement that was notable for its size, grassroots origin, and unorthodox strategies to achieve its demands. While spontaneous groups of veterans had protested for the bonus in the years before 1932, the number of marchers that came to Washington, DC that year exceeded expectation. During the months of May through July, approximately 15,000-20,000 veterans and their families camped throughout the capital. After Congress adjourned on July 16, 1932 without the passage of any legislation addressing the bonus, the veterans were left disorganized, confused, and far from home. Congress would not meet again for months, and veterans did not know whether to stay in the capital and

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<sup>4</sup> Gavin R. Jones, *American Hungers: The Problem of Poverty in U.S. Literature, 1840-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 65.

<sup>5</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 11-29.

continue their protest or make the long journey home. Many traveled too far to accept such an anticlimactic end to the Bonus Army, and as a result thousands of veterans stayed even when Waters advised them to leave Washington, DC. The veterans did not heed Waters' warning, and on President Hoover's order, the US Army invaded the camps and forced the ex-servicemen off public property and out of the city.

The Bonus Army's occupation of Washington, DC was not only a fight for due compensation; it also became a struggle of competing narratives. World War I veterans sought to portray themselves as law-abiding citizens entitled to their war pay while officials in the federal government framed the demonstrators as radical insurgents that posed a threat to American democracy. One of the most significant demonstrations of the twentieth century, the Bonus Army's effort to use the physical presence of their bodies to make a statement about their rights failed to achieve immediate results. The demonstration did not result in payment of the bonus as they had intended, yet the protest set a precedent for future demonstrations. The Bonus Army changed the way the nation understood public protest. Veterans adopted many of the strategies of previous demonstrations, including that of suffragist Alice Paul and her insistence on respectability during the 1913 Woman's Suffrage Parade. The Bonus Army, however, introduced the concept of mass demonstration; the more participants a demonstration attracted, the more legitimacy it was afforded. The large scale of the protest that summer distinguished it from the small veterans' marches of previous years. The tens of thousands of ex-servicemen that converged on the capital caused disruptions and captures national media attention, forcing both policy-makers and the public to pay greater attention to their demands. The Bonus Army's occupation of the District of Columbia was also an unusual

tactic that redefined how protesters used their bodies to make a political statement. This strategy of long-term occupation informed future demonstrations, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign of 1968.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the influence the Bonus Army had on future protest, the actions of Waters and other veterans were suppressed by public memory for a number of reasons, including racism and the fear of communism that tarnished veterans' efforts to gain public sympathy.<sup>7</sup> In many ways the depression spurred veterans to large-scale public protest, yet those who have written extensively on the topic argue that the financial crisis compounded with the fear of radicalism overshadowed the veterans' efforts, marring the story of the Bonus Army as "a great American epic lost in the margins of history."<sup>8</sup> This chapter challenges the assertion that the political and economic turmoil of the 1930s alone eclipsed the plight of the Bonus Army and it offers an alternative conclusion for why the demonstration remains a footnote in the study of the American past. The Bonus March was an integral part of the racial and economic history of the early twentieth century, serving as an example of the interconnectedness of World War I and its impact on the Homefront, the ramifications of the Great Depression on average Americans, and the influence of the programs of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration, including the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the New Deal.

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<sup>6</sup> The success of the 1913 Woman's Suffrage Parade, organized by Alice Paul, hinged on its perception as a respectable demonstration. In her book, *Marching on Washington*, historian Lucy Barber explained that not only did women need to prove that they were competent to participate in the democratic process; they also had to maintain reputability if they were to obtain permission from local authorities to plan the parade along of the streets of Washington, DC. Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 7; During the demonstration, police in Washington, DC were reporting to local papers that there were hundreds of new communists streaming into DC as part of the demonstration.; "Government Probing Communist Angle," *Corsicana Semi-Weekly*, June 03, 1932.

<sup>8</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 7.

To understand the significance of the Bonus Army and the competing accounts of how the events unfolded during the summer of 1932, this chapter examines the veterans' occupation of Washington, DC in the broader context of twentieth century protest, instead of limiting the study to within the political confines of the 1930s. Such an analysis reveals that the ex-servicemen's occupation of the capital was not merely overshadowed due to the prolific nature of the Great Depression, the Red Scare, or racial strife. While these were factors in shaping how scholars, educators, and interpreters approach the topic of the Bonus Army, this chapter reveals that the demonstration is overlooked and oversimplified due to powerful forces in Washington.

Fear of racial solidarity and communistic ideology were indeed driving forces in the government's decision to evict veterans from public property in Washington, D.C. yet the story of the Bonus Army fails to make its way into the country's collective conscious because it serves as an indictment of the federal government and its treatment of its citizens. Until the early twenty-first century, researchers did not have access to many of the official documents concerning the government's reaction to the Bonus Army as they were considered classified material.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps even more damning is the subsequent redevelopment of Anacostia Flats in the months after the demonstration. By redeveloping the flats into a National Park, federal officials not only erased the last tangible traces of the protest from the landscape and the evidence of its violent end, they also retained control over how this space is used and interpreted in present day.<sup>10</sup> nice

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The US federal government has a history of perpetrating violence and instituting systems of oppression against those with marginalized identities, including Indigenous peoples, immigrants, women, people of color, and gender nonconforming and sexually variant individuals. Recognizing and interpreting the places where these injustices occurred can lead to reconciliation and healing. Acknowledging acts of violence on

Examining the events during and after the Bonus Army's occupation of the capital in 1932, the chapter compares competing narratives by examining documents written by the Bonus Army, including the *Bonus Expeditionary Forces Newspaper* (also known as the *B.E.F. News*) and the memoir of Portland leader Walter Waters with recently declassified War Department documents and correspondences between federal officials. Analyzing the similarities and differences between the varying accounts allows for a more accurate retelling of the events that took place in Anacostia Flats, specifically the U.S. Army's forced eviction of veterans and their families in late June of 1932. The violent conclusion of the demonstration is one of the most controversial aspect of the narrative. In the aftermath of the eviction, media outlets and members of the public criticized the US government's handling of the eviction process. Under mounting scrutiny, the government opened investigations into the events of that night, including an inquiry into who set fire to the camp.

The discrepancies between the two versions of the demonstration and specifically the events of July 28, 1932 reveal the influence networks of power have on crafting a national narrative and the legacy this has in the present. Officials in various government

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the landscape and reinserting these stories into the historical record allows for a more accurate account of the past. There is a growing effort within government agencies, particularly within the National Park Service (NPS), to include the stories of all Americans in the retelling of the past. In recent decades, the NPS has added additional units such as Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site in Colorado and Manzanar National Historic Site in California to protect and interpret the painful yet significant histories associated with the government's treatment of minorities. The addition of the new NPS units speaks to the importance of studying the landscape when remembering the past. This approach to place-based history can help determine how and why certain voices are silenced and it offers opportunities for contemporary practitioners to address the erasure of these stories in collaboration with stakeholders. For more information concerning the power of place-based history and its ability to heal see: Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); *Martha Norkunas, Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

agencies, including the Chief of the United States Army General Douglas MacArthur, Secretary of War Patrick Hurley, and the President of the United States Herbert Hoover, used their positions of authority to authorize an unwarranted assault on American civilians. Their actions serve as tangible examples of how power and authority are used to silence stakeholders in order to rewrite history. The theory that “History is the fruit of power,” articulated by Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, is manifested in the story of the Bonus Army and their legacy (or lack thereof) in America’s collective conscious.<sup>11</sup> By retaining authority over the official documents pertaining to the Bonus Army, the landscape on which the demonstration occurred, and the official interpretation of the story, the United States government continues to control how this story is remembered by the American people.

### **“Provid[ing] adjusted compensation”: Congress Passes a Bonus Bill**

The fight for the bonus is associated with the demonstration of 1932, yet efforts to earn veterans additional compensation began shortly after World War I. America was late in joining the war; while fighting broke out in Europe in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson kept the country neutral until 1917. After America declared war on Germany in April of that year, troops were sent to Europe to support US allies on the Western Front. American soldiers received a base-pay of one dollar per day while serving, yet when the men returned home in late 1918 and early 1919, they believed they were entitled to additional compensation. Veterans like Joseph T. Angelo of New Jersey felt they

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<sup>11</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). xix.

deserved more than their meager base-pay due to the sacrifices they made such as leaving behind well-paying jobs, loving families, and the safety of home. Angelo was one of the heroes of the war after he saved a wounded General George S. Patton in combat.<sup>12</sup> While proud of his service, Angelo publicly chastised Congress and the whole United States government for paying inadequate wages. At a hearing held by the House Committee of Ways and Means in 1931, Angelo explained that before he had enlisted to fight in World War I, he had made \$1.25 an hour at DuPont Powder Works. As he was able to work as many hours as he wanted, Angelo was financially stable and looking forward to a prosperous life. When America declared war, Angelo willingly gave up his job and his civilian life to enlist in the military.<sup>13</sup> Men like Angelo felt that despite risking their lives for their country, they were at an economic disadvantage compared to those Americans who had not served. It was this sentiment that created discontent among otherwise proud veterans.

In 1924, Congress finally passed the World War Adjusted Compensation Act, also known as the Bonus Bill. While President Calvin Coolidge opposed the bill, Representative Hamilton Fish Jr., a Congressman from New York, placated the opposition by suggesting that bonuses be paid in 1945 instead of immediately. Intended to “provide adjusted compensation,” the act was a significant step for veterans and their allies, yet it did not stop continuing efforts to lobby Congress for immediate payment of the bonus. For many who served, immediate payment seemed the obvious course of action. Government officials recognized that paying out the bonus to the over one

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<sup>12</sup> ““Bravest Man in the American Army is Compliment Bestowed on New Jersey Boy by Tank Commander,” *Logansport Pharos-Tribune*, May 08, 1919.

<sup>13</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 36.

hundred thousand American troops who served in the war was a hefty financial burden. According to the terms of the World War Adjustment Act veterans would be awarded “\$1.25 for each day of oversea service and \$1 for each day of home service;” up to \$500.<sup>14</sup> While the 1945 deadline gave the government time to procure the funds needed to pay eligible veterans, the estimated amount owed collectively was staggeringly high, even by pre-depression standards. Based on the findings of the Senate’s Committee on Finance which met in March of 1924 before the bill was enacted, the US government would owe veterans roughly \$2,192,000,000 to \$4,358,329,000.<sup>15</sup>

Much of the political and social debate over whether to award veterans additional compensation for their service was rooted in the question of their value as American citizens. Policymakers, many of whom had never served in the armed forces, assigned a monetary figure to each veteran’s service. Interestingly, there was not large-scale protest over the amount veterans were to be paid. Instead, the Bonus Army was born out of a perceived injustice that the government was more invested in bailing out the banks and large corporations than in paying back what it owed its veterans.

In the years after the passage of the Bonus Bill, there was a growing disconnect between how the nation’s leaders understood military sacrifice in contrast to those ex-servicemen who lived it. As the Great Depression hit, veterans believed the government had the funds to award the bonuses—it was simply choosing not to. While this assumption was an oversimplification of the economic climate of the early 1930s, the

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<sup>14</sup> *An Act To Provide Adjusted Compensation for Veterans of the World War, and for Other Purposes*, HR 7959, 68<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (March 19, 1924).

<sup>15</sup> Senate Committee on Finance, *Adjusted Compensation Act: Hearings Before the Committee on Finance, on H.R. 7959*, 68<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1924, 5-6.

veterans did not understand why the government could not pay them immediately, nor did federal officials try to explain this when veterans gathered in Washington. The angst that drove these men to mobilize to the capital was fueled out of the belief that the government had money to pay veterans what they were owed, yet according to news headlines, government officials continued to bail out corporations before addressing the needs of the people. The lack of interest on the part of the federal government to address veterans' grievances led to civil unrest in the form of the Bonus Army. The formation of the Bonus Army indicated that the government's understanding of the economic climate was fundamentally different than how many Americans' experienced it. The federal government's refusal to pre-pay the bonus was not a denial of the veterans' service, yet it was symbolic of federal officials' preference in aiding big business rather than former soldiers.<sup>16</sup>

While there was a desire among some veterans to have their compensation paid sooner than 1945, there was little progress on this front until May of 1929 when Texas Senator Wright Patman co-sponsored a bill proposing pre-payment of the bonus. The bill failed to gain traction in Congress, yet it gave hope to thousands of veterans on the eve of the Great Depression. In the months that followed, America experienced an unprecedented financial crisis that left many without work. Like other Americans, veterans struggled to pay rent and secure basic necessities for themselves and their families. In the early years of the depression, Bonus Army leader Walter W. Waters "talked with hundreds of men and found that, with few exceptions, [veterans] wanted not

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<sup>16</sup> W. W. Waters and William C. White, *B.E.F.: The Whole Story of the Bonus Army* (New York: The John Day Company, 1933), 9.

charity but work that would enable them to live and to regain their self-respect.”<sup>17</sup> Men like Waters felt that the depression gave rise to extenuating circumstances that warranted immediate payment of the bonuses. Servicemen once willing to wait several decades for the money were no longer inclined to be patient. As Waters explained in his memoir, “...the Bonus in these men’s minds became a substitute or a symbol for that long dreamt of new start, a job.”<sup>18</sup> Not only was this money a practical way to address their growing poverty; the possibility of receiving the bonus was emblematic of a change in one’s fortune for the better. The money and what it represented was financial stability as well as the federal government’s appreciation for their service.

Efforts by legislators to propose and enact a law to pay the bonuses immediately fueled the hopes of many veterans. While some Congressmen like Wright Patman supported payment of the bonuses, President Herbert Hoover quashed this idea in his speech to the American Legion National Convention in Boston in October of 1930. Hoover’s concerns over the possibility of civil unrest due to the pre-payment of the bonus was evident in his speech. While he praised the veterans’ military service, he also reminded them that “without ordered government the very sacrifices which [they] had made . . . might come to naught.”<sup>19</sup> Hoover implied that the radicalism of socialism and communism threatened American civil liberties, and to combat this, veterans had to be dedicated to democratic process and to pacifism. This rhetoric of implying anti-American sentiments to those who continued to demand the bonus was later used by federal officials (including Hoover) to downplay the legitimacy of the Bonus Army’s demands

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<sup>17</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

during the summer of 1932 and justify the use of force in evicting demonstrators from the capital.<sup>20</sup>

### **The “facts about the B.E.F.”: Origins and Journey to Washington, DC**

Bonus Army veterans were not the first citizens, or even the first servicemen to use direct action and public protest against the federal government to make their grievances heard. As noted in the previous chapter, soldiers in the Continental Militia marched to Philadelphia’s Independence Hall in 1783 to hold Congress hostage when they were not paid for their service in the American Revolution.<sup>21</sup> The tradition of public protest continued even after the capital was moved to Washington, DC. In 1894, an Ohio man named Jacob Coxey organized “the first real march on Washington” when he led half a million unemployed Americans to Congress’ doorstep.<sup>22</sup> Reeling from the economic depression of the early 1890s, these demonstrators marched hundreds of miles to the capital to petition Congress to pass legislation that would create new jobs. Bringing their plight to Washington, demonstrators gained national attention and “invent[ed] a new form of political expression.”<sup>23</sup>

When Walter Waters spoke at the National Veterans’ Association meeting in Portland, Oregon on March 15, 1932, he was building on a long tradition of political protest. Speaking to a group of several hundred veterans, Waters argued that their current

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<sup>20</sup> Herbert Hoover, “Address of President Hoover at the Twelfth Annual Convention of the American Legion,” (lecture, Boston Massachusetts, October 6, 1930), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth R. Bowling, “New Light on the Philadelphia Mutiny of 1783: Federal-State Confrontation at the Close of the War for Independence,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 101, no. 4 (Oct, 1977): 419-450, 420.

<sup>22</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

efforts to win the bonus were not enough; writing Congressmen and signing petitions calling would not spur the government to take action. He claimed that veterans needed to gather in the nation's capital to protest and lobby Congress if they had any hope of achieving an early payment. Waters believed that "a group, whose only support was in its numbers, might go to Congress and make some impression."<sup>24</sup> His memoir, written with the help of William C. White, preserved his memory of the struggles of the Great Depression and the formation of the Bonus Army and its enduring legacy. Waters provided a detailed account of the journey to Washington, DC and he described the violent eviction that took place in Anacostia Flats located on the outskirts of the capital. The memoir also contains documents pertaining to the demonstration, including a roster of participants, correspondences of the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department and the White House, as well as official reports from the federal government. The War Department issued copies of its reports to White, who wrote and fact-checked the memoir. White also interviewed reporters, federal officials, and eye-witnesses to verify Waters' account.<sup>25</sup>

The memoir is an important piece of evidence in studying the protest, yet it was written in part to glorify the efforts of the veterans' and exonerate Waters himself from what he felt was unfair criticism. When the Bonus Army failed to win tangible legislation awarding pre-payment of the Bonus, Waters called off the demonstration. Believing there was little the veterans could do with Congress adjourned, Waters sought a more sustainable, long-term effort to secure the bonus. He was heavily criticized by his fellow

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<sup>24</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> White states his involvement in a short preface to the text as well as in the appendix.

veterans who believed he was capitulating to the government's demands. In the aftermath of the Bonus Army's eviction from Washington, DC, the *New York Times* described Waters as "assum[ing] the role of an American Hitler."<sup>26</sup> Waters, feeling unfairly attacked, published the memoir a year after the demonstration, claiming that he had "sold out to no one." In his words, the memoir was solely intended to put "the facts about the B.E.F. on accurate record."<sup>27</sup> Despite Waters' best intentions, his memoir exaggerated the Bonus Army's achievements and mythologized the demonstration's significance as one of the most notable protests in American history.<sup>28</sup>

While often criticized for his leadership, Waters did successfully rally one of the first mass demonstrations in the capital. As the Portland veteran tried uniting demonstrators in his home town in the spring of 1932, the bill proposing immediate payment of the bonus was defeated in Congress. Senator Wright Patman originally introduced the bill and argued that it would "help not only the veterans, but the entire country, and speed the return of prosperity." According to Patman, there were over 800,000 unemployed veterans looking for work, and he believed the least the government could do was to pay the debt it owed its ex-servicemen. Despite Patman's efforts, the bill was rejected, and the veterans lost what little hope they had.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>"Waters Urges All to Join New Force," *The New York Times*, July 30, 1932.

<sup>27</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Waters claimed that the "presence of the B.E.F. in Washington was partly the cause for passing the Wagner Relief bill." Also known as the National Labor Relations Act, the Wagner Act of 1935 advanced the rights of laborers. The legislation has little connection to the veterans' occupation of the capital in 1932 and the claim was most likely an attempt by Waters to exaggerate the significance of the demonstration. *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>29</sup> "All Uproarious on the Bonus Front," *Literary Digest*, April 23, 1932.

After Congress voted against the bill, veterans across America had little choice; they could wait until 1945 for the bonus or pursue methods of direct action to confront their government. Portland veterans were already agitated, and it took little convincing to round up several hundred men for a march on Washington. While some men left their families and homes behind, others were destitute and joined out of a sense of apathy as “there was little difference between hunger in Washington and hunger in Portland.”<sup>30</sup> Waters and several other ex-servicemen took the lead in verifying and registering veterans, arranging for food and transportation, and organizing participants into a military formation before commencing their journey to Washington with a parade through Portland.<sup>31</sup>

As Waters lead the original group of veterans to the capital, he had a tentative plan in mind – force the House of Representatives to revive Patman’s bonus bill. Aware of past efforts to march on Washington, specifically Jacob Coxey’s 1894 protest, Waters wanted a clear and concise goal, unlike Coxey’s objectives which were, according to Waters, “too vague.”<sup>32</sup> While the objective of the march was clear (at least in Waters’ mind), the demonstrators’ ability to achieve their demands hinged on garnering public support and embodying the image of a respectable and moral group of veterans. At the onset of the demonstration, there was a widespread assumption among many Americans that these Bonus marchers were disorderly, disorganized, and driven by a communist agenda. Waters understood that discipline and planning would help ensure their success – they had to project the appearance of respectability.

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<sup>30</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 16-19.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

Before the small group of veterans departed from Portland, Waters established a list of guidelines; participants had to be ex-servicemen of the First World War (family members were permitted, but Waters discouraged this), and he insisted that every participant “had to agree to be law-abiding and to submit to proper discipline as administered by elected officers.”<sup>33</sup> These precautions were necessary as any misbehavior on the part of the group would create a negative public image and would tarnish the group’s reputation and legitimacy before Congress. Their plan to make the House revive the Senator Patman’s bill and force Congress to take a vote depended on their ability to elicit sympathy from the public. If Americans thought the veterans were undeserving of immediate payment, Congress would be less inclined to pass a bill aiding the veterans.

Disciplinary precautions also extended to verifying all participants of the demonstration. Waters and his men were accused by media outlets of welcoming communists to participate in the march. Given the recent history of the Red Scare and rampant anticommunism, Walters chose actively to reject any connection with the left. According to Waters, he and the other leaders checked every man’s paperwork to verify his status as a veteran. Other civilians wanted to join in and show their support particularly as the movement gained traction in the summer months, yet Waters insisted exclusively on veteran participation in order to keep the issue of the bonus at the forefront and to prevent self-proclaimed communists from participating and tainting the movement.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Waters went to great lengths to ensure the men adhered to the law and he advised “against drinking, panhandling, begging, indulgence in talk attacking the Government, or engaging in any action unbecoming a gentleman or a soldier.”<sup>35</sup> The march to DC and the ensuing demonstration were solely focused on obtaining the bonus, and to achieve this, the veterans had to prove their worth as deserving citizens. Their success relied upon their ability to come across as respectable soldiers and contributing members of society despite their unemployed status. The march, while not about broader societal issues such as economic reform or welfare, was a way of stressing the veterans’ sacrifice to the country through their military service, and convincing both Congress and the public that they were not only entitled to the money but also in desperate need of it to support themselves and their families.

**“Every man was freshly shaven and every shirt was clean”: Veterans Make Their First Public Appearance in the Capital**

When the bonus marches first left Portland, there was little news coverage of the mission. As they made their way to Washington, veterans passed through and sometimes stopped in small towns where local newspapers reported on the movements of the demonstrators. On May 18, *The Columbus Telegram* reported that the group of veterans passed through Columbus, Nebraska. According to the paper, three to four hundred veterans rode through town aboard the Union Pacific Railroad. A small group of ex-servicemen traveling ahead of Bonus Army was responsible for arranging transportation and supplies.<sup>36</sup> This “Transportation Committee” (as Waters’ dubbed it), was able to

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>36</sup> “‘Bonus’ Veterans Go Through,” *The Columbus Telegram*, May 18, 1932.

secure passage via railroad through the charity of railroads like the Union Pacific, more specifically the sympathetic railroad workers who let the veterans ride in empty cars free of charge.<sup>37</sup> In other instances, veterans boarded trains illegally, but their luck ran out when they reached St. Louis.

By mid-May, neither national papers nor the federal government were paying much attention to the motley crew of men, until they made headlines in St. Louis. According to Waters, the federal intelligence community had taken little interest in the marchers, yet local law enforcement was wary.<sup>38</sup> When the group arrived in St. Louis, local law enforcement was waiting for them. According to Waters, police expected to encounter “a howling mob of roughnecks,” indicating that while word of the Bonus Army was spreading across the country, they did not have a good reputation.<sup>39</sup> Guarded by police, veterans spent the night in a freight yard in St. Louis. The town sheriff eventually provided the men with transportation to Indiana after the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad officials refused to let the veterans ride for free.<sup>40</sup> Towns in Indiana reacted similarly, offering the Bonus Army participants free transportation in order to evacuate veterans from their cities. As Waters describe it, local officials were “only too eager to co-operate. They did not want three hundred men in their city at two in the morning, all of them hungry.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.* 34.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>40</sup> “Delegation of Oregon Vets on Way to Capital,” *Delphos Daily Herald*, May 21, 1932; “Bonus Army Sets Train Free, Given Truck Ride,” *Oakland Tribune*, May 24, 1932; “Bonus Army Moves on State by Truck,” *The Indianapolis Star*, May 24, 1932.

<sup>41</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 57.

After the demonstrators left Indiana, the remainder of their journey was less dramatic. But, the approximately 300 men headed to the capital were now national news.<sup>42</sup> The federal government also watched the movement of the marchers, yet it offered no aid to the ragged group of veterans. Instead, it was often local charities, sympathetic citizens, and wary state and local officials who assisted the veterans in reaching their final destination. Similar to the municipal leaders in Indiana, state officials in Maryland provided transportation to veterans in order to get them off of Maryland soil and across the border to the District of Columbia.

On Sunday, May 29, Maryland's National Guard shuttled sixteen truck-loads of veterans into the capital. The ex-servicemen were met by Pelham Glassford, the Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia. Glassford, a former veteran himself, "personally supervised the arrangements for their care," by securing abandoned buildings for the men to rest. As the number of veterans entering the capital continued to grow, reaching 1,300 by early June, Glassford threatened to "enforce [his] edit of forty-eight hours as the limit of their stay" unless Congress chose to "foot their bills."<sup>43</sup> The police superintendent was concerned with the cost of housing and feeding the veterans and he only had enough donated supplies to sustain the veterans for a few days.<sup>44</sup>

Wary of the presence of the veterans both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia commenced their own undercover operations to monitor the activities of the veterans while in the

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<sup>42</sup> "Frederick Quietly Passed By Veterans," *The Baltimore Sun*, May 30, 1932.

<sup>43</sup> "Hitch-Hiking Bonus Seekers Reach Capital," *The Baltimore Sun*, May 30, 1932.

<sup>44</sup> "Congress Asked to Appropriate for Bonus Army," *Ames Daily Tribune*, May 31, 1932.

capital. The concern of the law enforcement was not shared by the residents of Washington. According to local writer John Forell, the impending army of veterans did not bother DC residents as they were “long accustomed to the ballyhoo of people with missions to the District of Columbia and the institutions housed within its boundaries.” In fact, most Washingtonians disregarded reports of veterans marching to the capital since, as Forell noted that, the city had learned over the years that “of the many [demonstrators] who start, few arrive, and that most of these last are void of either effectiveness or entertainment value.”<sup>45</sup> Residents and politicians, however, were not prepared for the sight of the veterans as they marched through the streets of the city on Monday, May 30, 1932. A last-minute addition to the city’s annual Memorial Day parade, the veterans marched in formation at the end of the procession. Locals gathered on Constitution Avenue to watch the usual parade participants followed by the veterans, who appeared “gaunt and flat-bellied.” In spite of the tattered state of their clothing, “every man was freshly shaven and every shirt was clean.” This was their public debut. The spectators were moved by the sight of the veterans, especially compared to the other participants, and the watching crowd “cheered and clapped in a great surge of enthusiasm.”<sup>46</sup>

Word spread quickly about the state of the veterans and local stores provided them with goods upon their arrival. Waters described how the veterans’ presence in DC was a welcome one as local residents “began to contribute liberally to making [the veterans’] stay in Washington as comfortable as possible.”<sup>47</sup> Forell’s account confirmed Waters’ assertion that the people of Washington, DC were hospitable to the ex-

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<sup>45</sup> John Forell, “The Bonus Crusade,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 9, no. 1 (January, 1933): 38-49, 38.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 76.

servicemen, but the writer noted that while welcome, the veterans “never became, even momentarily, an organic part of the Washington community.”<sup>48</sup> As a result, they had no permanent place within the fabric of the city and while residents were supportive, they were not willing to advocate for the veterans once they were forced out of the city.

After the veterans arrived in the District of Columbia, city officials grew anxious over the number of demonstrators still streaming into the capital. Newspapers across the country were reporting that other groups of veterans were making their way to the capital.<sup>49</sup> Glassford, in charge of maintaining order and finding lodging for the veterans, originally intended to house the ex-servicemen in vacant buildings across town, most of which were federally owned buildings located along Pennsylvania Avenue. But these abandoned structures did not provide sufficient shelter for the thousands of veterans now in the city. It was apparent that the demonstrators were not going anywhere, in fact, more were coming. With the Hoover administration officially refusing to acknowledge the Bonus Army, Glassford went to Congress for help.<sup>50</sup> In response, Senator Edward P. Costigan of Colorado proposed a \$75,000 aid package to help provide food and temporary lodgings for veterans. Other members of Congress were unsupportive as they believed that local officials should handle the problem.<sup>51</sup>

Without assistance from the Congress, Glassford sought permission from the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital to use Anacostia

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<sup>48</sup> Forell, “The Bonus Crusade,” 39.

<sup>49</sup> “Congress Asked to Appropriate for Bonus Army,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, May 31, 1932; “Valley Vets Will Arrange Bonus March,” *The Evening News*, June 8, 1932; “‘Red’ Charges Split Up City’s Bonus Army,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 05, 1932.

<sup>50</sup> Michael J. Rawl, *Anacostia Flats: Eisenhower, MacArthur, Patton, and the Rout of the Bonus Marchers* (Baltimore: PublishAmerica, 2006), 69.

<sup>51</sup> “Congress Asked to Appropriate for Bonus Army,” *Ames Daily Tribune*, May 31, 1932.

Field, a muddy stretch of land on the south side of the Anacostia River on the outskirts of Washington.<sup>52</sup> Located southeast of the federal center of the city, this area was historically underdeveloped. In the early-twentieth century, Progressive reformer Charles Frederick Weller wrote about this part of the city along the Anacostia River. Describing it as sparsely populated and prone to flooding, Weller categorized this region as one of the “plague spots” of the city.<sup>53</sup> At the time, the “Anacostia flats,” as they were known, included 1,100 acres that “demand[ed] reclamation, in order to free the eastern portion of the city from the malarial conditions which...constantly impaired the health of those persons...compelled to live within the miasmatic influences.”<sup>54</sup> In 1929, shortly before the veterans arrived in the District of Columbia, the government tried to revive the eastern half of the city, including the land along the river. City planners intended to beautify the eastern part of the city in order to make the Capitol Building the symbolic center of the city (instead of the Washington Monument). When veterans arrived three years later, little had been done to address the neglected state of eastern Washington, and the flats were still muddy and ill-suited for long-term occupation.<sup>55</sup>

Glassford began directing incoming veterans to this muddy terrain at the beginning of June, and over the next two months, Waters and approximately ten-thousand other veterans made this space home.<sup>56</sup> Anacostia Field, christened Camps Marks after

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<sup>52</sup> A precursor of the National Park Service’s National Capital Region, which manages public parks and monuments in Washington, DC today, the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital was run by Ulysses S. Grant III (grandson of President Ulysses S. Grant) from the late 1920s to the late 1930s. Rawl, *Anacostia Flats*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> Charles Frederick Weller, *Neglected Neighborhoods: Stories of Life in the Alleys, Tenements and Shanties of the National Capital* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1909), 234-241.

<sup>54</sup> McMillian Plan, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Sarah Luria, *Capital Speculations: Writing and Building Washington, D.C.* (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2006), 146.

<sup>56</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 94-96; Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 82.

Police Capitan S. J. Marks, head of the 11<sup>th</sup> precinct in Anacostia, became the epicenter of the Bonus Army.<sup>57</sup> For Glassford, the spot was ideal as a drawbridge over the Anacostia River connected the main landscape of the city with the muddy flats where the veterans were camped. The marchers could reach downtown Washington only by crossing the 11<sup>th</sup> Street drawbridge, which Glassford “could raise if at any time he wished to keep the men out of the city.”<sup>58</sup> The flats were also bounded by the Air Force’s Bolling Field to the east and a large drainage pipe to the south. Located near the 11<sup>th</sup> Police Precinct overseen by Glassford’s personal friend Captain Marks, the flats were closely monitored by metro police offices. In a letter to the three Commissioners of Washington, DC, Glassford explained that his decision to locate the veterans on the practically uninhabitable terrain hinged upon his ability to control their movements and isolate the demonstrators outside of the federal heart of the capital.<sup>59</sup> Glassford’s desire to control access to the city reflected the unease local and federal authorities harbored toward the veterans. As the only route into the city, the bridge would later serve as the focal point of the US Army’s eventual crusade to evict the veterans toward the end of July.

In spite of the dreary conditions in Anacostia flats, Waters and other veterans set about making camp and proceeding with their plan to win the bonus. One of the main priorities after relocating to the flats was to establish a process for registering newcomers.

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<sup>57</sup> While a majority of demonstrators were located in Anacostia Flats, smaller groups were dispersed across the southwestern portion of the city, including at the intersection of 12<sup>th</sup> and D Streets, the 200 block of 13<sup>th</sup> Street, the 1200 block of E Street, the 1300 block of C Street, at the intersection of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and Maryland Avenue, and at the intersection of 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Maryland Avenue. “Veterans,” O.S. Hunt of the Crime Prevention Bureau to Captain J.A. Sullivan, June 29, 1932, MS 0738, Container 6, folder “Army Intell,” Historical Society of the District of Columbia; Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen *The Bonus Army*, 97-105.

<sup>58</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 82.

<sup>59</sup> Rawl, *Anacostia Flats*, 70-71.

Waters insisted that all participants be former veterans, and anyone entering the camp had to visit a processing station with proof of their service. Men were also required to take an oath of allegiance to the United States to prove they were not communist infiltrators. Anyone discovered to be allied with the communist cause was beaten by the volunteer police force within the camp and ejected. The harsh treatment of those with Marxist sentiments exemplified the lengths veterans went to disassociate themselves from communist ideology, particularly as such an association would give federal authorities the justification needed to expel the veterans from the capital.<sup>60</sup>

As veterans settled in Anacostia, they built shelters from donated lumber and construction materials scavenged from a nearby garbage heap.<sup>61</sup> The former soldiers made their beds alongside men they knew from home, and soon the muddy flats were divided by state, and in some cases by towns. This was a way to retain identity as well as to claim donations coming from specific parts of the country. Communities across the United States sent supplies to the veterans, and when a specific state shuttled goods into DC for the demonstrators, men from that home state laid claim to the donations.<sup>62</sup>

While groups of veterans arriving in Anacostia also had their own designated leaders, Waters was popularly elected by the newcomers and still retained authority over the movement. He established ground rules for their stay, and each group was responsible for keeping their sleeping area tidy to avoid vermin and disease. There were orders to maintain discipline, but the men were free to come and go when they wanted. Unable to deter demonstrators from leaving camp, Waters and other leaders discouraged the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 75-6.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Dickson and Thomas B. Allen *The Bonus Army*, 108.

<sup>62</sup> Waters, 108; "Will Send Food to Berks 'Army'," *Reading Times*, June 10, 1932.

veterans from spending their time begging in the streets of Washington, DC as this could undermine their efforts to lobby for the bonus. Glassford had made it clear that the demonstrators would only be tolerated if they were orderly and well-behaved; any violent or criminal behavior would give the District Commissioners and the president grounds for eviction.<sup>63</sup>

**“Secur[ing] consideration for the Bonus bill”: Bonus Army Strategies and Tactics**

Once settled in Anacostia, Bonus Army leaders sought to organize a demonstration “to show to the city what kind of men made up the ever-growing B.E.F.”<sup>64</sup> The ex-servicemen wanted to prove to the Hoover Administration, to DC residents, and to America at large that they were ordinary citizens in need of their pay. An opportunity presented itself the first week of June. Officials in the War Department received reports from the field that protesters were marching from New York City to the capital with the intention of protesting on June 8<sup>th</sup>. Informed of the intelligence reports, Glassford worked with Waters to plan a veterans parade to take place the day before the communist rally. Glassford hoped the fanfare would distract the public from the communist demonstration. With the Bonus Army parade planned for June 7<sup>th</sup>, Waters agreed to keep his men away from the communist demonstration taking place the following day.<sup>65</sup>

While intended as a distraction, the Bonus Army parade was also an opportunity for the veterans to make introductions on their own terms and demonstrate their orderly demeanor. Over 8,000 veterans participated, marching down Pennsylvania Avenue

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>65</sup> Jack Douglas, *Veterans on the March* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1934), 57-59; Rawl, *Anacostia Flats*, 90-91.

toward the Capital Building, and more than 100,000 locals gathered to witness the funeral-like procession. According to reporter and World War I veteran Floyd Gibbons who witnessed the event, the veterans appeared older than their years, plagued with hardships of a long depression. Describing the somberness of the parade, Gibbons also commented that demonstrators were kept away from the White House and the Capital Building to prevent them from disturbing the country's leaders. The purpose of the veteran's mobilization to Washington was to directly confront Congress, yet local officials, acting under the authority of the War Department and the President of the United States, tried to prevent the demonstrators from achieving their goal.<sup>66</sup> *The Baltimore Sun* also reported that when veterans attempted to speak with their representatives, Capitol police officers ejected the demonstrators, claiming that their demeanor was "threatening."<sup>67</sup>

Comparing news coverage of the parade with Gibbons' eye-witness account reveals that Waters was correct in his suspicions regarding the motives of local officials. While Glassford in particular was accommodating of the veterans, to the extent of donating his own money to feed them, he was not working with Waters out of a sense of altruism as "his main job was not to take care of [them]." In fact, Waters insisted that Glassford received a reputation for keeping the demonstrators in line only because "the staff that led the B.E.F. was able to hold the men and not because the men looked on [Glassford] as leader."<sup>68</sup> While it seemed Waters appreciated Glassford's ability to

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<sup>66</sup> Rawl, *Anacostia Flats*, 93-94.

<sup>67</sup> "150 Ejected on Capitol Hill," *The Baltimore Sun*, June 7, 1932.

<sup>68</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 71.

empathize with the Bonus Army participants, the Portland veteran realized that Glassford's goal was to "rid Washington of the B.E.F."<sup>69</sup>

Glassford and other members of the local law enforcement sought to maintain order and control over demonstrators with the ultimate goal of evicting them from the capital. As Superintendent of the local police force, Glassford reported to the Commissioners of Washington, DC, a group of three officials who governed the capital city. In the 1870s, local leadership positions including the office of the mayor and city council were abolished by Congress in favor of a territorial government overseen by three commissioners. Appointed by the President of the United States, these Commissioners had an incentive to appeal to the president and defer to his judgment on certain decision affecting the capital, including the handling of the Bonus Army.<sup>70</sup> Glassford, while sympathetic toward the plight of the veterans, was acting on behalf of national leaders who refused to acknowledge the presence of the veterans in the capital.

In the days following the Bonus Army's procession down Pennsylvania Avenue, newspapers across the country reported on the growing civil unrest among ex-servicemen. June headlines also falsely claimed that the Bonus Army was infiltration by communists.<sup>71</sup> While communist protesters did have a presence in the city, local police recorded less than 300 communists out of the tens of thousands of veterans.<sup>72</sup> Various

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>70</sup> Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, "Incapable of Self-Government: The Retreat From Democracy, 1869-1890," in *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

<sup>71</sup> "Congress is Worried Over Bonus Situation," *Shamokin News-Dispatch*, June 7, 1932.

<sup>72</sup> Donald J. Lisio, *The President and Protest: Hoover, Conspiracy, and the Bonus Riot* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 93; Russell D. Buhite, *Patrick J. Hurley and American Foreign Policy*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1973), 55; Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 260.

intelligence agencies within the District of Columbia, including the Metropolitan police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation had also infiltrated communist factions gathering in the capital. The veterans attempted to reassure the city and the nation of their good intentions, yet their parade and ensuing presence in the capital only agitated government officials.

Congress continued to debate about how to handle the demonstration, yet the Hoover Administration refused publicly comment on the events<sup>73</sup> With President Hoover refusing to communicate with leaders of the Bonus Army, including Waters, the issue of addressing the veterans fell to Congress.<sup>74</sup> Members of Congress realized that they had to confront the situation, but many were divided on what to do. Some, like Senator George Higgins Moses from New Hampshire, recognized the impossible situation they were in; Moses argued that while the veterans should “not be allowed to stay [in DC], there [would] be trouble if [Congress] put them out.” Others, like Senator William Borah of Idaho, relied on the decades-old rhetoric that Congress could not favor some citizens (the veterans) over others by issuing early payment of the bonus.<sup>75</sup> Representatives eventually concluded that the best way to move forward was to vote on resurrecting Senator Patman’s bill to issue pre-payment of the bonus. Enough members of the House of Representatives supported the motion to revive the bill and it was eventually passed in the House.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>74</sup> Leaders of the Bonus Army went to the White House and personally placed a letter to the president in the hand of his secretary, yet Hoover refused to respond to the communication. “Bonus Petition Given Hoover, Curtis, Garner,” *Reading Times*, June 10, 1932.

<sup>75</sup> “Congress is Worried Over Bonus Situation,” *Shamokin News-Dispatch*, June 7, 1932.

**“Carrying News of the Bonus Army”: *The B.E.F. Newspaper***

By the early summer, America was captivated by the standoff between the Bonus Army and the government. Newspapers reported on the daily events of the demonstrators with mixed sentiments. Since the veterans’ arrival in the capital, their potential association with communist ideology was under constant speculation. A state or town’s reaction to the Bonus March was often mixed and even when the local press did not approve of the Bonus Army, many of local veterans still made the journey to Washington to participate. In Texas, for example, many community newspapers printed damning stories about the demonstration. Despite negative local press coverage, hundreds of Texas veterans spent the summer protesting in Washington. In early June, the *El Paso Times* reported that “Government agencies [were] investigating reports [that] the marches on the capital were inspired by communist organizations.” The paper reported that Emanuel Levin, a communist leader from New York City, “claim[ed] the bonus march originated with the Workers’ Ex-Service Men’s league, a Communist affiliate.”<sup>76</sup> While Levin’s claims were false, many Americans assumed some connection between the Bonus marchers and communist ideology. Other newspapers not only implied the Bonus Army’s communist affiliation; they denounced the demonstration as a threat to democracy. The *Corsicana Semi-Weekly*, printed in Corsicana, Texas, reported on the state of “mob law” in Washington, DC. Leaders of the local chapter of the Organization of Veterans of Foreign Wars claimed that while Texas veterans wanted the bonus, they would not stoop to join the ranks of the Bonus Army. But ex-servicemen from across the state did

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<sup>76</sup> Melbourne Christerson, “Advance Guard of Huge ‘Bonus Army’ Overflows Capital; Other Arriving,” *El Paso Times*, June 3, 1932.

participate. Newspapers reported that hundreds of Texans were joining the movement. The Metropolitan Police Department of Washington, DC reported almost 800 demonstrators from Texas while Waters recorded approximately 1,300 participants from the Lone Star State, indicating that the rhetoric of local veterans' organizations did not always accurately depict the sentiments shared by its members.<sup>77</sup>

A number of newspapers outside of Texas also labeled participants as “radicals” and “communists.” These reports may have been incited by increasing activity among law enforcement to identify, arrest, and expel suspected communists from the capital. According to *The Baltimore Sun*, “apprehension on the part of Federal authorities appeared to have increased today [June 9]” most likely due to the influx of communist protesters in the capital.<sup>78</sup> Despite Waters' attempts to keep the Bonus march exclusively about pre-payment of the bonus and prevent suspected communists from participating, Emanuel Levin and his followers caused trouble for the veterans. News outlets sensationalized the Bonus Army's connection with proclaimed communists. Over the next month, headlines reported the chaos in Washington, DC, including accusations that explosives found in buildings near the Capitol Building and in Camp Marks.<sup>79</sup>

Newspapers also incited public panic by reporting that the marchers posed a threat of spreading diseases.<sup>80</sup> Dr. Willian C. Fowler, the head Health Officer of the District of Columbia, reported that the “encampment at Anacostia flats was the worst menace to the

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<sup>77</sup> “Waco Commander Calls it Mob Law,” *Corsicana Semi-Weekly*, June 03, 1932; “Visiting Veterans in Washington by State and Cities,” Metropolitan Police Department report, June 3, 1932, MS 0783, container 6, folder “Army Intell,” Historical Society of Washington, DC; Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 257.

<sup>78</sup> Drew Pearson, “Bonus Army Ready to Emulate Gandhi,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 9, 1932.

<sup>79</sup> “Dynamite Found by Bonus Army in Former Red Camp,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 12, 1932.

<sup>80</sup> “Bonus Petition Given Hoover, Curtis, Garner,” *Reading Times*, June 10, 1932.

city's health since he took office."<sup>81</sup> Along with his assistant Dr. James G. Cummings, Fowler implored Congress and the president to address the "frightful" situation as it was "threatening to the people of Washington as well as to the jobless ex-soldiers and sailors." Fowler's report prompted Washington's District Commissioners to plead with the forty-eight governors to prevent their veterans from joining the growing number of Bonus marchers in the capital.<sup>82</sup> The health officer's assessment exaggerated the health threat the Bonus Army posed, panicking residents of the city and providing grounds for local and federal officials to take action against the veterans.

To combat the negative press and the exaggerated accounts of Fowler and Cummings, Waters sought a way to publicize the veterans' side of the story. The leaders of the Bonus Army recognized the power of the media in swaying public perception, and in June, the veterans established their own newspaper.<sup>83</sup> Named after the coalition of marchers, the *Bonus Expeditionary Forces Newspaper* (or *B.E.F. News*) originated as a way to raise money for supplies and educate the public about their cause. Based in downtown Washington at the Printcraft Building at 930 H. Street, N.W. (a printing office home to a number of papers and book binders), the newspaper was to be distributed "from coast to coast" to "inform the civilian population of the activities of the men at Washington."<sup>84</sup> Staff of the newspaper enlisted the help of sympathetic citizens in selling the paper. In New York City, for example, a young woman wearing a World War I style

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<sup>81</sup> "Dysentery Breaks Out Among Members of the Bonus Army," *The Daily Courier*, June 30, 1932.

<sup>82</sup> "Capital Asks States to Halt Bonus Trek; Epidemic is Feared," *The New York Times*, June 10, 1932.

<sup>83</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 113.

<sup>84</sup> "Camden Men on Staff of B.E.F. Newspaper," *Evening Courier*, June 29, 1932; "George A. Simonds & Co.," Advertisement, *The Slingonian*, October 8, 1931.

helmet reportedly sold the *B.E.F. News* in Times Square that summer.<sup>85</sup> Members of the public were essential in helping veterans circulate their chronicle of events.

The paper's editors were elected by the veterans themselves. While not all staff members were dedicated to the mission of the *B.E.F. News* (the original editor collected money from the first three editions and disappeared with the funds), it was a way "of carrying news of the Bonus Army in Washington" and sharing their stories with the rest of the country. Editors also recognized that they had "to make the paper of interest to the public" in order to build a substantial readership in order to win public sympathy.<sup>86</sup> Using the *B.E.F. News* as well as coverage from other media outlets, the Bonus Army was able to raise awareness about its mission and gain public support.

Media coverage, such as the *B.E.F. News* and other local papers, was critical in documenting stories about veterans and their families and in providing a portrayal of the realities of living in make-shift camps. With demonstrators' facing an "alarming shortage of food" by the end of June, issues of the *B.E.F. News* were important in spreading the word about their cause and in winning support in the form of donations for food and other supplies.<sup>87</sup> Not only did the newspaper help generate donations, it also showed the public a different side of the demonstrators. With its headquarters in downtown Washington, the eight-page tabloid reported on the daily activities of the men and their families and published articles and cartoons that often chastised the unwillingness of the government

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<sup>85</sup> "Vets Take Government's Rail Fare Bounty," *Daily News*, July 20, 1932.

<sup>86</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 136-7; quote from Scott B. McCafferty and O.L. Daily, "Our Policy" *The B.E.F. News*, MS 0738, Container 12, Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>87</sup> Press Release by Pelham Glassford, June 29, 1932, MS 0738, container 6, folder "Army Intell," Historical Society of Washington, DC.

to work with veterans to pay the bonus.<sup>88</sup> In contrast to other news outlets that often depicted the Bonus Army as a rag-tag group of radical vagrants, the *B.E.F. News* humanized the men by featuring stories about their war service, their professional successes before the depression, and – perhaps most importantly – their families.

Coverage about the veterans' lives in Anacostia focused on the presence of wives and children as a way emphasize the role of veterans as caregivers. According to Waters, by the end of June 1932, “there were two hundred and twenty wives and children attached to the B.E.F.” and by the time the United States Army forcibly displaced those in Anacostia Field at the end of July, there was a total of seven hundred women and four hundred children.<sup>89</sup> The *B.E.F. News* featured stories of families like that of the Phippenbrings of Florida. Mrs. Edmond Phippenbring was heavily pregnant when she accompanied her husband to Washington, DC. Hitch-hiking hundreds of miles, the soon-to-be parents joined other veterans in Camp Marks in Anacostia that summer. On Saturday, July 9, 1932, the *B.E.F. News* announced that Mrs. Phippenbring was taken to Gallinger Hospital in DC to give birth. Their baby was the first child born during the demonstration. The paper celebrated the newborn as a “historic character,” akin to the “the first baby born on the Mayflower and the first white child born in America.” The newspaper article described plans for a public christening once the mother and child returned to the Anacostia Camp from the hospital.<sup>90</sup> The story about the Phippenbring

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<sup>88</sup> “Camden Men on Staff of B.E.F. Newspaper,” *Evening Courier*, June 29, 1932.

<sup>89</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 109-111.

<sup>90</sup> “B.E.F. Welcomes First Camp Baby,” *The B.E.F. News*, July 9, 1932, MS 0738, container 3, Historical Society of Washington, DC.

family also reveals the communal setting of the bonus camps and how bonds were formed throughout the two-month demonstration.

Stories printed in the paper also challenged the rhetoric of local and national officials. While news outlets such as the *Associated Press* and the *New York Times* interviewed local leaders and health officials about the state of the bonus shantytowns, the veterans printed their own stories about the sanitary conditions of the Anacostia Flats and other camps. The *B.E.F. News* confirmed that veterans did have access to medical treatment as Glassford had established a “Bonus Clinic” at the 6<sup>th</sup> Marine Reserve Brigade headquarters located on Indiana Avenue, several blocks from the Capitol Building.<sup>91</sup> There was also a registered nurse at Camp Marks; a Miss Laretta D. Arsanis from New York volunteered to treat the veterans and their families. Her assessment of the situation at Camp Marks was more optimistic than that of Fowler or Cummings. Arsanis lived in a tent in the camp and reported that as of July the veterans and their “children [were] all in good health, and in spite of [the] heat, there [was] very little of the usual summer complaints among the children.”<sup>92</sup> While the Anacostia flats were as previously noted, constantly muddy with the rain and fluctuations of the river, the veterans used their military training to dig a “serviceable latrine system.”

The men and their families also tried to keep clean by bathing in the Anacostia River, which did pose health risks as the water was polluted – a reflection of the city’s mismanagement rather than the veterans’ hygiene habits.<sup>93</sup> While a reasonable amount of

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<sup>91</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 107.

<sup>92</sup> “Miss Laretta D. Arsanis, Camp Marks Nurse,” *The B.E.F. News*, July 27, 1932, MS 0738, container 5, folder “BEF News Crusader,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>93</sup> Rawl, *Anacostia Flats*, 131-2.

illness was to be expected from thousands of people camping together in sub-par conditions, the veterans and their wives and children remained remarkably healthy. Communicable diseases were not responsible for much of the misery in the camps; the weather was the biggest threat to the demonstrators' health. *The Baltimore Sun* described how the "chilling rain" that June created "puddles of mud" where the men slept. The lack of adequate shelters also caused "concern on the part of physicians."<sup>94</sup> A *New York Times* interview with Dr. Fowler published June 10 revealed that despite his claims of an inevitable epidemic, there were only 23 veterans ill with communicable diseases out of the almost 20,000 gathered in the capital. By the doctor's own admission, most men were suffering from exposure and malnutrition, not disease.<sup>95</sup>

In addition to publishing their own papers, members of the Bonus Army sought other ways to share their message with the public. Members of the public were welcome in Camp Marks, and tourists, reporters, and DC residents took the opportunity to tour the bonus camps. Visitors typically parked their vehicles on the 11<sup>th</sup> Street bridge, slipped into recreational shoes, and strolled through the mud to explore the camp. According to an article published in the *B.E.F. News*, curious visitors often asked about life in the camps. The fact that Camp Marks became a popular tourist destination during the summer of 1932 reveals the prevalence of the demonstration in popular rhetoric of the time. Veterans graciously spoke with outsiders and described what life was like in the shantytown. The men often compared their experience in Anacostia Flats to their military service overseas. The ex-servicemen lived with only the basic necessities; they had

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<sup>94</sup> "House Faces Test Today on Cashing Bonus," *The Baltimore Sun*, June 13, 1932.

<sup>95</sup> "Capital Asks States to Halt Bonus Trek; Epidemic is Feared," *The New York Times*, June 10, 1932.

makeshift shelters and their meals consisted of the “same old favorites” – beans and bread.<sup>96</sup>

The veterans made sure they had a very public presence, through the publication of the *B.E.F. News* and in opening the camps to the public. Waters also made sure their voices were heard in national papers, including in the *New York Times*. Waters offered interviews to well-read papers and on June 10, the *New York Times* featured an exclusive interview with the Portland veteran. In the article, Waters explained that because veterans “offered their lives for their country” they were “due to the same consideration as the bankers and railroad owners whose property was protected” in the years after World War I. Waters appealed to the public in that “all [he] ask[ed] was just payment.”<sup>97</sup> Waters also traveled to major cities in the region to share news of the Bonus Army. On July 13, he boarded a plane to Pittsburgh and spoke in the downtown area as well as the town of McKeesport and gave two speeches while there. Not only did he share news of the Bonus Army’s plan in the ensuing months, he also pleaded for donations as food supplies were running short.<sup>98</sup> The actions of Waters and other veterans indicated that they were not occupying the capital simply to capture the attention of policy-makers. They understood the power of public sentiment in applying pressure to their elected leaders, and they sought to win the support of the American people through the power of the press.

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<sup>96</sup> “B.E.F. Organizes Service of Supplies Like that in France,” *The B.E.F. News*, June 25, 1932, MS 0738, container 3, Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>97</sup> “Capital Asks States to Halt Bonus Trek; Epidemic is Feared,” *The New York Times*, June 10, 1932.

<sup>98</sup> “Veterans’ Home Will Be Built in Washington,” *The Pittsburg Press*, July 14, 1932.

### **“Hold the Men in Washington”: The Bonus Army’s Determined Resolution**

By mid-July, the House of Representatives passed Senator Patman’s bill calling for immediate payment of the bonus, and it then went to the Senate for a vote. Despite the Bonus Army’s success in reviving the bill, President Hoover announced that he would veto the bill if it passed the Senate. Waters was politically savvy enough to understand that if President Hoover kept his promise to veto, at least two-thirds of the Senate would have to vote to override the president’s decision—an unlikely scenario for such a controversial piece of legislation.<sup>99</sup> Despite the presence of 8,000 Bonus marchers on the steps of the Capitol and another 8,000 in Anacostia Field, the Senators voted 62 to 18 to defeat the bill.<sup>100</sup>

The Bonus Army’s hope of achieving pre-payment of the bonus that summer was stymied by the Senate’s verdict. The veterans did, however, achieve tangible gains through this legislative process as Congress’ vote on the bonus bill became part of the public record. Veterans’ planned to use this information in the upcoming election to support and campaign for those Congressmen who voted in favor the bill.<sup>101</sup> Once categorized as disorganized, the veterans used direct action to craft a long-term strategy by leveraging their enfranchisement as citizens. This kind of sophisticated political maneuvering indicates that leaders like Waters had foresight in how to use the demonstration to achieve success.

Not all participants shared Waters’ knowledge of the political system; indeed, their stay at Anacostia was “an education in economics and, eventually, in politics.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 87.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 150.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 88-89.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

Men came from all over the United States, with the DC Metropolitan Police recording veterans from 31 states. Waters' records indicate that veterans from forty-six states participated, including demonstrators from the District of Columbia, the Territory of Alaska, and the Philippines.<sup>103</sup> While some ex-servicemen hailed from large metropolitan areas such as Detroit, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and New York City, there were thousands of men unfamiliar with the workings of the federal government and the process for passing legislation.<sup>104</sup> These men were exposed to new ideas and different perspectives during their two months in Washington. Not only were they exposed to new political ideas, veterans also interacted with fellow servicemen of different ethnicities.

The underlying motive for the demonstration was payment of compensation, but many veterans participated for other reasons, including to find comradeship and to obtain a free meal and a place to sleep. The demonstration had a mass appeal as veterans were able to socialize with fellow servicemen who were facing similar financial struggles. United in their poverty, participants of the Bonus Army did not adopt segregationist policies like most of the United States. Camp Anacostia was not segregated by race and African American veterans like Sergeant Parnham from Cincinnati, Ohio, and American Indian soldiers like Chief Running Wolf from New Mexico were important participants in Bonus Army and its goal to win pre-payment of the bonus for *all* veterans.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> The Philippines was a US territory until 1946. Ibid, 257-259.

<sup>104</sup> "Visiting Veterans in Washington by State and Cities," Metropolitan Police Department, District of Columbia, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1932, MS 0738, container 6, folder "Army Intell," Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>105</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 121-122.

### **“Dissolving the B.E.F. as a force in Washington”: Waters Concedes Defeat**

Congress refused to approve pre-payment of the bonus that summer, but demonstrators were committed to staying in the capital until their bonus was awarded. Waters continued to receive letters of support from many non-military civilians and in his mind, “the Bonus March, in the eyes of multitudes, was assuming another meaning for many Americans.” He claimed that their show of political dissent was interpreted by the American people as a “nation-wide protest against ... the Administration, against crooked politics, [and] against unemployment.”<sup>106</sup> In some respects, his assessment was correct. Members of the public wrote to local and national papers in support of the veterans. Brice Clagett of Washington, DC wrote to the *New York Times* in July claiming that he had “made it a point to talk personally with many of the marchers.” He concluded that “aside from a small minority of radicals, [the] group [was] made up of an unusually high type of men.” From his conversations with the veterans, Clagett surmised that they did not want charity, instead they wanted to work and earn fair wages. Concluding that it was “not sufficient to merely demand that they go home,” the Washington, DC resident suggested that the government provide the men with work by relocating them to a subsistence farm. Clagett expressed his frustration with authorities, particularly the Hoover Administration, as they adopted an attitude of “indifference” toward the veterans instead of addressing the protesters.<sup>107</sup> People like Clagett fueled Waters’ belief that the Bonus Army was carrying out the desires of the public by confronting federal authorities and by serving as a

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>107</sup> Brice Clagett, “Work for the Bonus Army,” letter to the editor, *New York Times*, July 20, 1932.

physical embodiment of the suffering many Americans endured during the Great Depression.<sup>108</sup>

In spite of public support, the Bonus Army began to fracture after Congress adjourned that summer. With Congressmen leaving the capital for the remainder of the summer, demonstrators were unable to continue their goals of demanding the swift passage of legislation. Bonus Army leaders offered different suggestions for how to proceed while others attempted to take control and lead the demonstration in a new direction.<sup>109</sup> Local and federal authorities took advantage of the internal struggle within the Bonus Army, convincing Waters that a prolonged stay in Washington was not ideal. Waters was conflicted over his decision to conclude the demonstration. In his memoir, he admitted that in the prior months, he had publicly encouraged veterans to stay in the capital until the bonus was paid, yet he changed his mind after Congress concluded its session on July 16. With representatives on break, he “realized that all hope of [their] getting the Bonus at [that] time was lost.”<sup>110</sup> Other participants did not understand Waters’ rationale for calling off the Bonus Army, and they believed he had “sold out.”<sup>111</sup>

By mid-July, Waters had “...resolved unconditionally on dissolving the B.E.F. as a force in Washington...”<sup>112</sup> Instead of continuing to occupy the capital, he intended to establish a permanent organization to help advocate for the bonus. Waters wrote in his memoir that he distributed a bulletin to the various Bonus Army camps throughout city

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<sup>108</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 78-79.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>111</sup> “Meeting of the Workers Ex-service Mens League at 6<sup>th</sup> and Market Space, N.W.” Report by S.N. Scott Private Crime Prevention Bureau, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1932, MS 0738, container 6, folder “Intell,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>112</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 174.

on July 17, informing the men that “there [was] nothing more that [they could] hope to achieve in Washington at this time” as Congress was out of session and unable to make headway on passing a bill that would grant immediate payment of the bonus.<sup>113</sup> He encouraged the protesters to leave, and his official rosters showed a notable and steady decrease of demonstrators in the following days. On July 16th, the day before Waters released the bulletin, his officials recorded 22,374 people at various locations in District of Columbia. By July 26<sup>th</sup>, Bonus Army records showed that the number of veterans and their families had decreased to 14,925.<sup>114</sup> Waters admitted that he “expected no trouble with the Administration when [he] saw the B.E.F. shrinking by a thousand men a day,” but media coverage challenged the assertion that Bonus Army numbers were dwindling. The *Washington Post* reported that the size of Camp Marks in Anacostia seemed to be growing.<sup>115</sup> Similarly the magazine *The American Veteran* claimed that the men of the Bonus Army planned to stay in Washington, despite the defeat of the bonus bill. The magazine asserted that the veterans had “mistakenly relied on the word of dishonest politicians...” and the ex-servicemen were determined to continue the demonstration until the bonus was paid.<sup>116</sup>

Many veterans did in fact ignore Waters and continued their efforts to win the bonus by holding small-scale demonstrations throughout the city. Ex-servicemen Alfred Hale and John Sabrashacki were arrested on July 18 for inciting other veterans to protest in the streets. Another veteran by the last name of Kalb was fined \$25 for “parading

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 176-7.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 178-9.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 181; Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 152.

<sup>116</sup> “Bonus Army of Occupation Plans to Hold Washington,” *The American Veteran*, July 1932, MS 0738, container 10, folder 5, Historical Society of Washington, DC.

without a permit at the White House...” and an additional \$5 for “disorderly conduct.” In addition to the growing civil unrest, there were also unsubstantiated reports that 17,000 New York veterans were marching to Washington to take part in the demonstration. Different branches of DC law enforcement worked with the New York City police department to discredit the claim, yet federal and city officials were disturbed by the possibility of a growing movement.<sup>117</sup>

According to Waters’ memoir, he and his lawyer Herbert S. Ward met with Secretary of War Patrick Hurley and Chief of the United States Army General MacArthur on July 26<sup>th</sup> to discuss the future of the Bonus Army. Waters claimed that Hurley was eager to have the veterans out of the city, and he warned that if any of the demonstrators broke the law, it would give him justification to enact martial law and send in the army. When questioned about the exchange, Hurley later denied that he made such a statement.<sup>118</sup> Waters claimed that Hurley was frustrated with the Bonus Army as it posed a supposed communist threat to the capital and its policy-makers. Such a charge by the Secretary of War was a serious one, particularly as local and federal authorities had previously created a contingency plan for protecting the capital from civil unrest. In response to the Bolshevik overthrow of the Russian tsar, federal authorities in Washington, DC created what was known as the “White Plan.” Established in the 1920s, the plan laid out a strategy for preventing and responding to potential riots. This plan was amended by the War Department during the summer of 1932 to include specific

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<sup>117</sup> Major General Staff of the War Department Paul Killiam to Major Pachal, July 18, 1932, MS 0738, container 6, folder “Army Intell,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>118</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 194.

provision addressing the Bonus marchers, requiring all law enforcement to be in “a constant state of readiness.”<sup>119</sup>

In addition to his fear of a Marxist overthrow, Hurley also believed that a man had no excuse to be poor. In his mind, poverty was a result of laziness and a weak work ethic. Also a veteran of the First World War, Hurley could not understand how he, a man of modest origins, managed to amass such a fortune and enter elite society while men like Waters remained poor. Hurley equated the demonstrators’ poverty with laziness – an assumption that informed how federal officials addressed the demonstrators – and he allegedly had no sympathy for the veterans and was eager to forcibly evict them from the capital.<sup>120</sup>

### **“Going into action against the Bonus Marchers”: The Expulsion of Veterans from Washington**

Despite Waters’ plea for veterans to vacate the city, many stayed, and others continued to arrive. Impatient with the lingering demonstrators, authorities sought a strategy to clear Bonus marchers from federal property. The ongoing Federal Triangle building project became an ideal excuse to oust veterans squatting in downtown. In 1901, a committee of US Senators known as the McMillan Commission created a new landscape design for the capital city to develop and update the growing metropolis. A major part of this plan included the creation a central district for federal workers in the part of the city bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue and the National Mall (now known as

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<sup>119</sup> Roger Daniels, *The Bonus March, An Episode of the Great Depression* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1971), 159.

<sup>120</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 197.

Federal Triangle). Work began on the building project in 1926 yet progress lagged due to construction challenges. In the summer of 1932, many of the vacant buildings in this part of town became temporary homes to protesting veterans.<sup>121</sup> The Treasury Department, in charge of managing the development of Federal Triangle, used its authority to commence the demolition of vacant buildings, evicting veterans from the property. On July 21, Metro Police Superintendent Glassford informed Waters that the Treasury Department requested veterans to evacuate all property “bounded by Pennsylvania Avenue, Missouri Avenue, and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets, Northwest” as well as buildings located on 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets.<sup>122</sup> Veterans had three days to evacuate, from July 22 through July 24. The Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Ferry K. Heath claimed the area where the demonstrators were temporarily squatting was undergoing renovations, and veterans needed to vacate to allow for continued construction. Suspicious of the Treasury Department’s intentions, Waters consulted his lawyer, Herbert Ward, who offered his services free of charge. Ward confirmed that the government was within its legal rights to evict the demonstrators. However, he discovered that there were no immediate plans to develop the properties where the veterans were squatting.<sup>123</sup> The veterans did not have the legal authority to use the space, yet the Treasury Department’s false pretenses for evicting the squatters only exacerbated the veterans’ discontent. The Treasury

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<sup>121</sup> Howard Gillette, Jr., *Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 127.

<sup>122</sup> Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Ferry K. Heath to the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, July 26, 1932, MS 0738, container 6, folder “Army Intell,” Historical Society of Washington, DC; Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 181.

<sup>123</sup> Several businesses had secured injunctions against the government development project, presenting it from moving forward. Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 187.

Department requested additional police presence in the area in the following days to prevent disgruntled veterans from interfering with the impending construction work.<sup>124</sup>

The Treasury was not the only agency calling for the eviction of the veterans. The Superintendent of Public Buildings and Parks, an independent agency responsible for overseeing public buildings and lands in the capital, originally proclaimed that “no objection would be made to the use of certain public parks,” by Bonus Army participants. The superintendent was accommodating of the veterans until Congress adjourned in mid-July.<sup>125</sup> With the future of the bonus now uncertain, the superintendent announced that if he continued to allow veterans to occupy public property, he would be “failing in the enforcement of the laws governing the lands”.<sup>126</sup> The call for veterans to leave the city was echoed by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, the three city leaders appointed by the president. Not only were they appointed by the president, the Commissioners also felt pressure to appease Congress as it allocated funding for the capital. Acting in the interests of the federal government, the Commissioners informed Waters’ that the Anacostia Flats had to be evacuated by August 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>127</sup> The Commissioners secretly planned to evict the Bonus Army sooner than the first week of August, but local law enforcement officials, including Glassford, were ordered to “keep Waters in the dark” about the plan.<sup>128</sup>

Waters spent the last week in July trying to persuade veterans and their families to evacuate the city in order to “prevent the use of the Army against [them] which [he] felt

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<sup>124</sup> Heath to the Commissioners, July 26, 1932, Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>125</sup> Quote from Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 182.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

<sup>127</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 158.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

otherwise was inevitable.” On the morning of July 28, as he was speaking to a group of ex-servicemen occupying a section of Pennsylvania Avenue, Waters received a message from the Commissioners of the District of Columbia. They were demanding the immediate evacuation of the Bonus Army from federal property.<sup>129</sup> The eviction began less than an hour later as Metro police arrived to escort veterans off the property. Demonstrators went peacefully for the first two hours until a group of men holding an American flag emerged from the steadily growing crowd. The men, who Waters asserted were self-proclaimed communists, began throwing bricks at the police and a scuffle ensued before Glassford intervened.<sup>130</sup> A local police officer responsible for surveilling the Bonus Army over the course of its occupation also identified at least one of the violent offenders as a communist. While the confrontation lasted only five minutes, it was enough for Waters to inform Glassford that he was no longer able to control the demonstrators. At midday, Glassford met with the city Commissioners to discuss the situation. The commissioners later claimed that Glassford requested federal aid in controlling the demonstrators, but Glassford was convinced he had control over the situation and he denied that he requested assistance.<sup>131</sup>

Whether Glassford requested federal intervention or not, the US government was ready to step in. That morning Chief of Staff of the US Army General Douglas MacArthur met with Major General Blanton Winship, the Judge Advocate General of the Army. Winship, acting as legal advisor for the Army, informed MacArthur that he thought it as wise if President Hoover declared martial law. If Hoover gave the order, the

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<sup>129</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 207.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 214.

<sup>131</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 166-8.

military, under the command of MacArthur, would have sole authority in handling the Bonus Army demonstrators.<sup>132</sup> In preparation, MacArthur telephoned Brigadier General P.L. Miles shortly after 1:30pm with instructions to ready the troops based at Fort Washington (located in Maryland) and at Fort Myers (in Virginia).<sup>133</sup> MacArthur ordered the soldiers to assemble at the Ellipse in front of the White House “with a view to going into action against the Bonus Marchers who were occupying Government property and resisting police who sought to eject them.” Miles was instructed to inform MacArthur as soon as the troops arrived in Washington.<sup>134</sup>

Minutes after MacArthur issued the order, the situation in downtown Washington became more volatile. Fighting broke out again between Metro police and demonstrators and two veterans were shot and killed.<sup>135</sup> The violent turn of events provided further opportunity for the federal government to intervene. After “the civil government of the District of Columbia [had] reported to him that it [was] unable to maintain law and order in the District,” President Hoover conferred with Secretary of War Patrick J. Hurley.<sup>136</sup> Hoover, increasingly concerned for his own safety since the Bonus Army’s arrival, used the escalating civil unrest to conscript the US Army to oust the former veterans from the capital. Hoover, once set on ignoring the Bonus Army, now responded with drastic

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>133</sup> “Record at Signal Corps Message Center Room 1032 Munitions Building,” record of events, July 28, 1932, MS 0738, container 5, folder “War Department Eviction Papers,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>134</sup> Brigadier General P.L. Miles to Chief of Staff of the US Army General Douglas MacArthur, “Report of Operations Against Bonus Marchers,” August 4, 1932, MS 0783, container 9, Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>135</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 168-9.

<sup>136</sup> Secretary of War Patrick J. Hurley to Chief of Staff of the US Army General Douglas MacArthur “Order to Cooperate With District Police to Maintain Law and Order in the District,” July 28, 1932, MS 0738, container 5, folder “War Department Eviction Papers,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

measures.<sup>137</sup> After speaking with the president, Hurley sent a message to MacArthur around 3pm requesting support from the U.S. military. Hurley ordered MacArthur to lead US troops to “surround the affected area and clear it without delay.”<sup>138</sup>

Shortly after 4pm on July 28, US troops were assembled at the Ellipse. They were given orders to evict the veterans and were supplied with gas grenades before engaging Bonus Army demonstrators. Over the next several hours, soldiers evicted veterans from federal property from 6<sup>th</sup> street up to the Capital Grounds. In a show of force, Cavalry officers made their way down Pennsylvania Avenue while tanks were stationed on 6<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W. More soldiers held back crowds of onlookers who gathered to witness the event.<sup>139</sup> According to the *Baltimore Sun*, the troops “made war” not only on the veterans, but on the curious spectators.<sup>140</sup> After clearing occupied buildings in and around 6<sup>th</sup> Street, the US Army used tear gas to evict veterans in buildings located on Missouri Avenue between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Street S.W. Troops continued to make their way southward through the city and received what Brigadier General P.L. Miles described as a “brick-hat shower” from veterans taking refuge in nearby buildings. The ex-servicemen were not the only ones resisting federal troops; Brigadier General Miles noted that troops also encountered “antagonistic and annoying” civilians as infantry and cavalry battalions moved southward through the city.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> The president’s security became an issue of greater concern in 1932 out of fear that disgruntled citizens frustrated with the depression would plan assassination attempts. Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 84.

<sup>138</sup> Hurley to MacArthur, “Order to Cooperate With District Police to Maintain Law and Order in the District,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>139</sup> Miles to MacArthur, “Report of Operations Against Bonus Marchers,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>140</sup> “Troops Burn Anacostia,” *Baltimore Sun*, July 29, 1932.

<sup>141</sup> Miles to MacArthur, “Report of Operations Against Bonus Marchers,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

The army succeeded in clearing many of the streets at the center of the city by 8pm that evening. An hour later, the Brigade Commander gave the order for troops in to invade Anacostia Flats to “evacuate Bonus Marchers from the property.”<sup>142</sup> Official government documents and eye-witness accounts from Bonus Army veterans and members of the press reveal what occurred in the following hours. These sources, however, offer contradictory accounts of what happened on the night of July 28. The reports provided by military officials do not align with those of reporters and the veterans themselves, raising questions about the army’s actions under the command of General MacArthur.

Infantry soldiers arrived outside Camp Marks at 10pm followed shortly by the Cavalry. Tanks were stationed at the drawbridge that spanned the Anacostia River, blocking the path from the flats to downtown Washington. At the request of the veterans, MacArthur waited an hour before entering the camp to allow ex-servicemen time to gather their wives and children and flee. Men and women desperately attempted to gather their belongings before troops moved in with tear gas. Waters described one couple who tried to futilely dig their automobile out of the mud.<sup>143</sup> US troops eventually moved in to Camp Marks shortly after 11pm, using tear gas and setting fire to the veterans’ shelters. Shortly after midnight, MacArthur held a press conference at his headquarters defending the Army’s actions.<sup>144</sup> Back in Anacostia, infantry soldiers continued to make their way

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 233.

<sup>144</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 181-182.

through the flats, expelling remaining veterans as the Calvary remained stationed just outside the camp into the early hours of the morning.<sup>145</sup>

### **“Tact and good judgment”: The Federal Government’s Aftermath**

On the morning of July 29, undercover operatives with the War Department reported to the president’s Chief of Staff that while a substantial exodus was occurring among veterans, there were unsubstantiated reports of more demonstrators making their way to the capital. Police also interviewed a witness named Evan Magers who claimed to have overhear displaced veterans plotting to kill President Hoover.<sup>146</sup> Federal officials were also concerned with the gatherings of communist-leaning groups such as Workers Ex-service Men’s League. While similar meetings had occurred throughout the two-month Bonus Army demonstration, officials expected to see a decline in the number of pro-communist people in the capital.<sup>147</sup>

Despite the reports that thousands of new veterans may arrive in the northern part of the city via the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in the coming days, soldiers under the command of MacArthur continued to clear Camp Marks until midday on July 29<sup>th</sup>. After 2pm, troops were given an order to march from Anacostia to the center of the city and clear remaining buildings on the outskirts of the District of Columbia that were still occupied by demonstrators. The army moved systematically through the center and western portion of the city evicting the remaining veterans and destroying any shelters

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 8

<sup>146</sup> Military Intelligence Division of the War Department to Chief of Staff of the US Army General Douglas MacArthur, memorandum, July 29, 1932, MS 0738, container 6, folder “Army Intell,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>147</sup> Lieutenant Webber of the District of Columbia Detective Bureau, intelligence report, July 29, 1932, MS 0738, container 6, folder “Army Intell,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

they had used over the past 2 months. Over the twenty-four-hour period, troops used 1,000 gas grenades as they forcibly displaced over 10,000 men, women, and children.<sup>148</sup>

While a small number of veterans continued to march to the capital, the number of Bonus Army demonstrators declined in the following weeks. The federal government had seemingly gotten control of the situation, yet military officials faced increasing scrutiny in the months following the Bonus Army's eviction. At the beginning of August, as news of the confrontation between Bonus marchers and the US Army made national news, the Justice Department began making inquiries about the tactics used on July 28 to evict veterans. Attorney General William D. Mitchell requested that General MacArthur provide the Justice Department with "a statement . . . giving the facts within [MacArthur's] knowledge on . . . any acts of violence committed" and whether the veterans' shelters were burned by the military.<sup>149</sup>

Military leaders denied the use of violence and they claimed that the veterans themselves had set fire to their own camps. MacArthur was particularly outspoken in his claim that there was no wrongdoing on the part of federal troops. While they denied any use of physical force, military leaders did confirm the use of tear gas against civilians in Anacostia.<sup>150</sup> Brigadier General P.L. Miles of the 16<sup>th</sup> Brigade was also questioned about the events that occurred on the night of July 28. He claimed that when US troops entered

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Attorney General William D. Mitchell to Chief of Staff of the War Department General Douglas MacArthur, August 2, 1932, MS 0738, container 7, folder "MacArthur Report," Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

Camp Marks, the veterans responded by setting fire to their homes.<sup>151</sup> Media reports, however, called the accuracy of Miles' statement into question. Journalists such as Joseph C. Harsh and Thomas Henry witnessed the soldiers set fire to the veterans' shelters.<sup>152</sup> Due to the conflicting reports about who started the blaze, an official federal investigation was opened to determine the cause of the fire in Camp Marks. Miles maintained his claim that the "fires in the camp on the Anacostia flats were initiated by the occupants," yet he was forced to concede that some of the fires may have been started by the soldiers themselves. In the weeks after the Bonus Army's eviction, the *Washington Herald* published an article about the US Army's brutality toward veterans and their families. The article also featured a photo of a soldier identified as Private Thomas E. Davis, Company M, Twelfth Infantry, holding a torch, poised to ignite a shack. The article was tangible proof that the US Army was at least marginally involved in the arson of veterans' property, and an embarrassed Miles admitted that soldiers under Lieutenant Colonel Louis A. Kunzig were "mistakenly believing that an order to burn all the shacks had been given." Local police further encouraged troops to burn the camps.<sup>153</sup>

Despite the miscommunication between commanding officers, US troops, and local law enforcement, Miles praised the soldiers on the ground for their "tact and good judgment" when carrying out this "difficult task without serious casualties."<sup>154</sup> While

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<sup>151</sup> Brigadier General P.L. Miles to Chief of Staff of the War Department General Douglas MacArthur, "Firing of the Shacks Occupied by Bonus Marchers," September 23, 1932, MS 0738, container 9, folder "Bonus fires," Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>152</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 180.

<sup>153</sup> Miles to MacArthur, "Firing of the Shacks Occupied by Bonus Marchers," Historical Society of Washington, DC; George R. Brown, "Mitchell B.E.F. Report Full of Glaring Inaccuracies, Washington Writer Finds," *Washington Herald*, September 18, 1932, MS 0738, container 5, folder "BEF News - Crusader," Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>154</sup> Brigadier General P.L. Miles, "General Orders, No. 4 for the Sixteenth Brigade, United States Army," August 3, 1932, MS 0738, container 9, Historical Society of Washington, DC.

Miles confessed to some of the mistakes made by the Army during the eviction of the Bonus demonstrators, MacArthur refused to acknowledge any wrong-doing on his part. The Chief of Staff of Army reported that “many acts of violence were committed by a riotous mob after the arrival of the troops”, yet he exonerated his soldiers of any misconduct by claiming that “there was no serious casualties reported...from either side.” He refused to take responsibility for the destruction caused by the fire in Anacostia Flats. Despite veterans’ accounts, eye-witness reports, and the *Washington Herald* article citing the US Army as the culprit of the blaze, MacArthur maintained his claim that the camps were burned by the veterans themselves as he gave no orders to ignite the shacks.<sup>155</sup>

While the military was criticized for its firing of the Bonus Army camps, it was also under scrutiny for its involvement in the death of a Bonus marcher’s infant son, Bernard Myers. On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1932, the War Department launched an investigation to determine how the baby died. Major Leon Fox, Chief of the Medical Division of the Chemical Warfare Service, was instructed by the Chief of Chemical Warfare Service Major General Harry L. Gilchrist to “make a thorough examination of the child in question.” Fox reported that he went to Gallinger Hospital to see the child. He admitted that he “did not make a detailed examination...” of the baby, yet he concluded that “one thing [was] for certain – the child [did] not appear to present any symptoms of injury from chloroacetophenone,” the gas used against the bonus demonstrators. The baby was

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<sup>155</sup> Chief of Staff of the US Army General Douglas MacArthur to Attorney General William D. Mitchell, August 2, 1932, MS 0738, container 7, folder “MacArthur Report,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

allegedly sick before being exposed to the gas and the hospital concluded that while the gas worsened the baby's condition, it was not the ultimate cause of death.<sup>156</sup>

Waters described the events of July 28<sup>th</sup> as “the crime against the B.E.F.”<sup>157</sup> Even though demonstrators were leaving the capital in large numbers, Waters strongly believed that the “B.E.F. was not going to be permitted to dissolve without an attempt to stir them up.”<sup>158</sup> His poignant eye-witness testimony described the terror the occupants of the flats felt when soldiers launched gas bombs into the fleeing crowds. Armed with guns and bayonets, the troops descend into Camp Marks destroying the only property veterans had. Family members were separated during the fray, unable to locate their loved ones until days later. One veteran from Toledo, Ohio ran with his infant into his arms, “blow[ing] breath down the child's throat, trying to save the child from the whiff of gas that has gotten into the baby's asthmatic lungs.”<sup>159</sup>

The War Department and President Hoover did not express any public remorse for the treatment of the World War I veterans and their families, yet the confrontational eviction process made headlines over the next several months, earning veterans widespread public attention and sympathy. In mid-July, there was an overall sense of agreement on the part of the public, federal authorities, and local leaders that the Bonus Army needed to disperse. Had the president forthrightly acknowledged the veterans and their demands and avoided military confrontation, the protest may have ended peacefully.

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<sup>156</sup> Chief of Chemical Warfare Service Harry L. Gilchrist to the Adjutant General of the War Department's Office of Chief Chemical Warfare Service, “Investigation of Alleged Tear Gas Injury,” August 2, 1932, MS 0738, container 7, folder “MacArthur Report,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>157</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 238.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 234.

The decision of Hoover and Hurley to abruptly end the demonstration only succeeded in validating the veterans claims that “in Washington there were men to whom the making of political capital is more important than protecting human life.”<sup>160</sup> The Army’s actions only served to incite public outrage toward the Administration.<sup>161</sup>

The mismanagement in addressing and eventually expelling veterans on the part of the President, Congress, and the US military resulted in unnecessary violence against veterans and their families. Due to the structure of the local government, Washington, DC was closely regulated by federal officials, and those in positions of power used their authority to avoid addressing the Bonus marchers. Waters sought an audience with the president by sending telegrams to his aides, yet the Hoover Administration gave no outward sign that it “was even conscious of [the Bonus Army’s] presence in the city.” As the Administration refused to officially acknowledge the thousands of demonstrators in the capital, local officials were tasked with addressing the influx of protesters. Tasked with managing the mass demonstration, it was Glassford who finally urged federal officials to engage with the veterans. However, after meeting with Secretary of War Patrick Hurley, Glassford was informed that “the problem was a ‘local’ one for [Glassford] to handle.” While the federal government tried to ignore the issue or at least not take a public stance on it, Glassford was forced to take an active role in monitoring the Bonus Army participants.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>161</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 191-5; Donald J. Lisio, “A Blunder Becomes Catastrophe: Hoover, the Legion, and the Bonus Army,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 51, No. 1 (Autumn, 1967): 37-50.

<sup>162</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 71.

While there was a level of collaboration between the federal government and local authorities both directly and indirectly, it was important for Hoover and his administration to frame this as a local issue to delegitimize the demonstration and obscure their message by refusing to grant the veterans a national platform. The president ignored Waters' requests for a meeting, and he spent most of the summer at Camp Rapidan in Virginia.<sup>163</sup> Such tactics only created more tension in the capital as it prevented veterans from achieving their most important objective – to directly confront their elected leaders. The Portland veteran assumed that a mass presence of veterans in the capital would compel elected leaders to acknowledge the poverty that plagued American's World War I vets. Much to the demonstrators' chagrin, Waters pointed out, the federal government "put the problem on the city."<sup>164</sup> The veterans wanted their government to acknowledge and bear witness to the struggles they were facing as a result of the Depression. Hoover refusal to acknowledge the thousands of veterans in the capital and his handling of the eviction proceedings only served to frustrate veterans further, win them public support, and played a role in his unsuccessful bid for reelection.<sup>165</sup>

The question of why Hoover chose to dismiss veterans and then abruptly evict them remains at the heart of the narrative of the demonstration. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Democratic nominee running for president that year, was also confused by Hoover's response to the veterans. He questioned the drastic and controversial nature of

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<sup>163</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 84.

<sup>164</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 76.

<sup>165</sup> In examining the correspondence between naturalist Mary Vaux Walcott and Lou Hoover, author Marjorie G. Jones notes that the way President Hoover addressed the Bonus Army negatively impacted his bid for reelection in late 1932. Marjorie G. Jones, "The Joy of Sympathetic Companionship: The Correspondence of Mary Vaux Walcott and Lou Henry Hoover," *Quaker History* 103, No. 1 (Spring 2014), pp. 36-52, 44.

the decision, especially at a time when Hoover needed public support to win reelection.<sup>166</sup> The plight of the Bonus Army and Hoover's handling of the situation was emblematic of his response to the Great Depression at large; he adopted a tactic of non-intervention that contributed to his loss to Roosevelt in the 1932 presidential election. The correspondences of Hoover's wife Lou during the summer of 1932 provide insight into the president's mindset during the two-month occupation. When she learned of the Bonus Army's fate, the first lady wrote to her friend Mary Vaux Walcott expressing sympathy for the veterans, yet she concluded that "There was simply no other course for the President to pursue as guardian of the welfare of the District..." While the veterans' predicament was regrettable, Lou Hoover believed their poverty and current condition was "one that should be met by local or state action," not by the federal government. She consoled herself with the knowledge that her husband's response was justified as "there was a very considerable number of men" in the Bonus Army "gathered together to spread propaganda of the worst sort..."<sup>167</sup> The Hoover's exoneration of their response to the Bonus Army was warranted (in their opinion) due to the demonstration's association with communism. The first lady's words and the president's actions indicate that they believed the fate of tens of thousands of starving veterans was not their responsibility – it was the role of the state and local governments to provide for the World War I veterans until they received their bonuses.

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<sup>166</sup> Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 184.

<sup>167</sup> Correspondence of Mary Vaux Walcott and Lou Henry Hoover, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, cited in Jones, "The Joy of Sympathetic Companionship," *Quaker History* 103, no.1, 45.

### **“United and organized”: The Legacy of the Bonus Army**

Waters measured the success of the Bonus Army not in its ability (or in this case, inability) to persuade Congress to pass legislation granting immediate payment of the bonus. Instead, he evaluated it on the long-term outcomes of the veterans' presence in Washington, DC in the summer of 1932. He claimed that while the Bonus Army was forced out of DC by the local and federal government, they were successful in what they were able to achieve. He notes that while there were in the past efforts “to organize large nation-wide groups of American unemployed,” yet in his mind, the Bonus Army “was the only one that was united and organized.”<sup>168</sup> An effort to assuage his guilt for how the demonstration ended, Waters also writes in his memoir that the Bonus Army prompted the passage of the National Labor Relations Act (or Wagner Act) in 1935. He claims that the Bonus Army was one of the first organized, mass demonstration of unemployed Americans is valid, yet the demonstration had little influence on the passage of legislation improving the rights of workers.<sup>169</sup> His attempt to co-opt responsibility for the Wagner Acts reveals his need for tangible successes in the months following the dissolution of the Bonus Army as very little was done to aid veterans until the Roosevelt took office in March of 1933. The Bonus Army did achieve incremental goals, including the reduction of the interest that veterans had to pay on loans they took out against their bonus (reduced from 4 to 3 percent). Such gains seem so small as to be inconsequential, yet it was important for the veterans to recognize some form of achievement for their sacrifice during the summer of 1932. Most importantly, the presence of the veterans in the capital

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<sup>168</sup> Waters and White, *B.E.F.*, 70.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

that summer "...played a decisive part in the November elections and in the defeat of the Republican Party."<sup>170</sup> In hindsight, their presence helped pave the way for a more liberal government led by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who would implement some of the most progressive reforms of the twentieth century. While Roosevelt did little to help the veterans themselves, he implemented sweeping reform programs that ushered in a new area of social reform programs and average Americans began to understand and perceive poverty differently. According to historian Lucy Barber, the Bonus Army demonstration also informed future public protests as it led to "an increase in federal tolerance and even assistance to political demonstrations."<sup>171</sup>

In the following years, veterans continued to march to the capital to demand payment of the bonus. The summer of 1933 was particularly notable due to the involvement of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who paid a personal visit to one of the veteran camps. Her presence among the veterans and their families had a calming effect. While the president did not support pre-payment of the bonus, the First Lady's visit gained the Administration the support the veterans.<sup>172</sup> The Roosevelts' acknowledgment of the plight of the veterans was an important turning point in validating their struggles. Roosevelt eventually helped create programs where World War I veterans were given special consideration, including enrollment in the Civilian Conservation Corps. They finally won the bonus in 1936.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>171</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 105.

<sup>172</sup> Historians such as Marjorie Jones, Lucy, Barbara and others have commented on the influence of the Bonus Army in Hoover's loss in November of 1932. Jones, "The Joy of Sympathetic Companionship," 44; Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 11-29; Dickson and Allen, *The Bonus Army*, 216.

## **Shifting the future of Public Protest: Occupation Demonstrations and the Role of the National Park Service as America's Story-Teller**

Waters and thousands of other World War I veterans rallied in Washington, DC in the summer of 1932 because they believed that collective action combined with widespread public support had the power to leverage the attention of policy-makers.<sup>173</sup> While the occupation of the capital lasted only a few months, the name “Bonus Army” was evoked in the following years to describe new groups of veterans marching on Washington for their payment. As one of the first mass demonstration in American history, it changed the way Americans perceived public protest as veterans used their bodies to physically occupy federal space to make a political statement.

Today, the Bonus Army's presence in the District of Columbia is memorialized in several ways, but the landscape that was once home to thousands of protesting veterans and their families provides little indication of the struggles that occurred almost a century before. The Anacostia Flats, managed by the Park Commissioner at the time of the 1932 Bonus Army demonstration, was transferred to the National Park Service in 1933. Since that time, the park has been renovated and upgraded and is now a popular attraction to DC residents and tourists alike. Not only does the landscape bear scant memorial to the veterans, the National Park Service offers little interpretation about the confrontation between citizens and their government. The following chapters in the dissertation will explore the contemporary significance of the Bonus Army's presence in what is now Anacostia Park and how the National Park Service a federal agency, interprets the government's role in shaping and interpreting the landscape of the past.

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<sup>173</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 11-29.



## CHAPTER IV: THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN AND THE DEMAND FOR ECONOMIC EQUALITY

The Bonus Army's occupation of Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1932 redefined the process for expressing political dissent and set a precedent for how citizens used public space to make demands of their elected leaders. The occupation of the Anacostia flats and other properties throughout the city by World War I veterans served as a testament of the power of civil disobedience in influencing policy and public sentiment, and in following years, the nation's capital continued to serve as a central space for expressing free speech. By mid-century, marching on Washington became a symbol of America's democratic dogma as the physical act of occupying public space served as a way to amplify one's message to a national audience. A. Philip Randolph's proposed plan for a Negro March on Washington in 1941, for example, was enough to prompt President Franklin D. Roosevelt to concede to Randolph's insistence on greater economic protections for African Americans in military contracting during World War II.<sup>1</sup> Two decades later, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) used Randolph's concept of marching on Washington to reinforce and invigorate the national struggle for Black civil rights.<sup>2</sup> This 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom became an iconic moment in civil rights history, so deeply rooted in the country's political consciousness that a permanent memorial now marks the spot where King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002), 108-112.

<sup>2</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1988), 840.

<sup>3</sup> Barber, *Marching on Washington*, 142.

King hoped to leverage the power of protest in the nation's capital again five years later when he began to organize a demonstration uniting poor Americans across ethnic divides, a project soon known as the "Poor People's Campaign." In contrast to his role in the 1963 March on Washington, King's leadership of the Poor People's Campaign is all but forgotten, understudied by academic historians and absent on the historic landscape of Washington, D.C. The campaign's marginalization in the academic scholarship on the Civil Rights Movement affects the ability of public interpreters to address and include this history in official interpretation, specifically that of the National Park Service (NPS), the federal agency that currently manages the landscape where the campaign took place. This chapter seeks, in part, to offer primary-source research that brings a new depth to the scholarship on the Poor People's Campaign in ways that will support its interpretation on the landscape today.

The National Park Service has thus far largely ignored the Poor People's Campaign from the historic landscape of Washington, D.C., a decision that is particularly problematic because of the agency's involvement in the campaign's history. Since the National Mall – the site of the protest – is overseen by the National Park Service, department officials were responsible for managing the protest as it unfolded in 1968, initially allowing protesters to gather there and then later disbursing them. As steward of many of the country's natural and cultural sites, the National Park Service plays an important role in the official (government sanctioned) narrative of the nation's history.

The National Park Service's intimate role in both facilitating the campaign and abruptly evicting protesters has made the agency's commemoration of this history challenging. To authentically tell this story, the NPS would need address its own

unflattering role in forcibly ending the protest. As a federal agency that adopts a place-based approach to the past, interpreting the stories of America's cultural landscapes is not only within its purview, but is a core tenet of the agency's mission.<sup>4</sup> As a federal agency, the narratives crafted by the NPS also function as an "official" version of the past as propagated by the United States government, yet political sentiment often shifts with the ushering in of new presidential administrations. This power structure is problematic and dangerous as it discourages the inclusion of multivocal perspectives from the retelling of the past. Those figures and events excluded from NPS interpretation thus fall outside of the approved version of American history and remain hostage to the powers that be.

The question of why certain demonstrations are celebrated over others is at the heart of this dissertation. This chapter examines the role of the National Park Service in facilitating and subsequently erasing the physical remains of Poor People's Campaign. It further investigates the current state of official interpretation within the National Capital Region (NCR) and the National Mall to assess if the federal agency is willing to forthrightly address conflicts of democracy, including interpreting acts of public protest against the government.

This chapter applies Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot's analysis of power to the study of the Poor People's Campaign, looking at two of these processes and systems: academic history and federal authority. The erasure of voices from the past that challenge established systems of power, as Trouillot noted in his study of the production of history, is the result of processes operating within a structured system and requires the

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<sup>4</sup> Anne Mitchell Whisnant, Marla R. Miller, Gary B. Nash, and David Thelen, *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service* (Bloomington: Organization of American Historians, 2011), 11.

participation of many individuals.<sup>5</sup> In the case of the Poor People's Campaign, the involvement of federal officials in this history has limited the ability of the National Park Service to fully and accurately interpret these events. The lack of scholarship, public interpretation, and physical memorial to the Poor People's Campaign diminishes its significance in the progression of the Civil Rights Movement as well as its influence in informing proceeding social movements of the twentieth century.

This chapter begins by evaluating the academic historical scholarship on the Poor People's Campaign to demonstrate the extent that historians have, for the most part, failed to recognize the significance of this campaign. Then, I turn to an in-depth analysis of the role of federal authorities, specifically the National Park Service, in managing and controlling the protest as it unfolded on the federal landscape. I consider the SCLC's ability to leverage their claim to occupy public space by examining records from the National Park Service and Department of the Interior and examine the reactions of federal officials to the SCLC's demands. This chapter concludes by arguing that that the careful examination presented here of the relationship between protesters, NPS officials, and NPS law enforcement offers a way that scholars and interpreters can incorporate a greater degree of multivocality in the historical production of the Poor People's Campaign.

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<sup>5</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

## **Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement**

In the aftermath of World War II, race relations in the United States changed as returning African American troops began demanding the respect of white society. Plaintiffs also challenged the legality of segregation in court. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court rendered its decision in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, ruling that the policy of segregation in public schools was “inherently unequal.”<sup>6</sup> Along with using the legal system to question racially discriminatory policies, citizens also began to rely on civil disobedience as a way to protest unfair laws and precedents. Beginning in the early 1950s, bus boycotts took place across southern cities. The most well-known act of protest took place in 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama with Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat to a white rider. She was subsequently arrested, and in response, pastor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the Montgomery Bus Boycotts. For over a year, African Americans in Montgomery refused to take public transportation, resulting in a loss of revenue that eventually led to the integration of the local transit system, securing King’s place as a formidable leader in the fight for Black civil rights.<sup>7</sup>

King and others, including Reverend Ralph Abernathy, Bayard Rustin, and Ella Baker, established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. While by no means the only organization advocating for Black equality, the SCLC became a leading force behind the movement, planning protests and marches, including the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August of 1963.<sup>8</sup> Due to its mass marketing

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<sup>6</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>7</sup> Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1997), 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> Other groups active in the Civil Rights Movement include the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) established in 1909, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) founded in 1942, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organized in 1960.

strategy, the march successfully attracted an unprecedented number of participants, and President John F. Kennedy's support further legitimized its place as one of the most iconic demonstrations in American history. The march exemplified the effect mass demonstration had in capturing national attention and in influencing policy makers.

In the years that followed, Congress approved the Civil Rights Act (1964) and the Voting Rights Act (1965), which were intended to secure equal employment opportunities, access to public accommodations, and voting rights for all citizens regardless of race, gender, religion, or national origin. Historian James R. Ralph Jr. claimed that the passage of these acts signified the movement's "greatest triumphs." These legislative achievements, however, created a "crisis of victory" that raised questions about how the movement should proceed.<sup>9</sup> As politicians and the American public became distracted by the Vietnam War, there was decreasing urgency to address the inequalities that lingered in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act. In fact, historian Gerald D. McKnight claims that the war directly disrupted the fervor of the movement and distracted government leaders.<sup>10</sup>

At a Southern Christian Leadership Conference staff meeting in the spring of 1967, King announced his intention to expand efforts to address human rights as well as civil rights.<sup>11</sup> Conceptualized and planned by King and the SCLC, the Poor People's Campaign sought to appeal to a wider audience than previous civil rights demonstrations

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<sup>9</sup> James R. Ralph, Jr. *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993), 29.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald D. McKnight, *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People's Campaign*, (Boulder: Westview, 1998), 13.

<sup>11</sup> Heather Gray, "King's Poor People's Campaign," *Southern Christian Leadership Conference Magazine* (Summer 2018): 16-17.

in that it aimed to address the economic inequalities of all Americans. The campaign deviated from previous protest strategies in several key ways. No longer adopting the tenets of respectability politics to pander to white politicians, King identified poverty as an underlying factor of racial oppression and class struggle. While the campaign was still based on the principles of nonviolence, King did not seek to prove the worthiness of participants to gain individual rights; instead, he sought to expose systemic class oppression and achieve major economic reform to advance impoverished Americans as a social class.<sup>12</sup> To achieve these goals, King worked with other SCLC leaders and collaborated with other stakeholders such as Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and poor whites to plan “a massive movement organizing poor people . . . to demand their rights at the seat of government in Washington, D.C.”<sup>13</sup>

King’s announcement for a protest for economic rights was influenced in part by the Vietnam War. For King, “racial injustice, poverty and the Vietnam War were inextricably linked,” yet he waited almost two years to condemn American involvement with the hope of preserving a united Black movement.<sup>14</sup> Taking a public stance put the Civil Rights Movement in a precarious position. Fearing he would divide Black communities one way or the other, King refrained from either endorsing or condemning the conflict when the United States became involved in 1965. However, as public

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<sup>12</sup> William Julius Wilson, “Foreword,” in Sylvie Laurent, *King and the Other America: The Poor People’s Campaign and the Quest for Economic Equality*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), x-xi.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Other America,” in Cornel West, *The Radical King: Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Boston: Beacon Press 2015), 240.

<sup>14</sup> Stephen Oates, “Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” (New York: New American Library, 1982), quoted in Douglas Sturm, “Martin Luther King, Jr., as Democratic Socialist,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 18, no. 2 (1990): 79-105. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40015109>, 101.

attention toward the Civil Rights Movement waned, King became increasingly outspoken in his message, and by 1967 he publicly denounced the U.S. presence in Vietnam.<sup>15</sup>

In the face of dwindling interests in the Civil Rights Movement, King saw a need to address societal problems especially given the implications of the war on lower class Americans. Even with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, King recognized that racial injustice was still prevalent in American society. Shortly after he denounced the Vietnam War, King began planning “a massive civil disobedience campaign,” intended to unite Americans based on economic status.<sup>16</sup> According to McKnight, the planning of the Poor People’s Campaign was a direct response to King’s frustration with the war as well as white America’s “lack of moral compass.”<sup>17</sup> By the mid-1960s, King perceived America society as “ridden with racism at home and economic exploitation and rampant militarism abroad.”<sup>18</sup> In the ensuing months, King devoted his efforts to planning a different type of demonstration that would maintain his policy of nonviolence while being “dramatic” and “disruptive” to capture the attention of Congress.<sup>19</sup> Intended to pressure Congress to pass an Economic Bill of Rights, the Poor People’s Campaign reflected King’s “desire to broaden the Black freedom struggle into a larger human rights struggle.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> McKnight, *The Last Crusade*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow, 1986), 582.

<sup>20</sup> Lauren Pearlman, “More than a March: The Poor People’s Campaign in the District,” *Washington History* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2014), pp. 24-41, 25.

The Poor People's Campaign of 1968, organized by King and implemented by Reverend Ralph D. Abernathy and other SCLC leaders, Native American activists including Tillie Walker and Mel Thom, and Chicano activists such as Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, was the manifestation of King's frustration with the lack of progress in race relations and it reflected his intention to create a more inclusive movement. Recognized as "the last and final dream of Martin Luther King," the demonstration was a radical departure from King's earlier rhetoric of appeasement.<sup>21</sup> The SCLC worked with local chapters and other organizations in cities and regions throughout the country to arrange transportation to bring protesters to Washington, D.C. Demonstrators arrived in the capital throughout the months of May and June and established makeshift shelters in West Potomac Park just south of the Reflecting Pool near the Lincoln Memorial. That summer, approximately 3,000 Black protesters, Latino activists, American Indian protesters, and poor Appalachian whites made a temporary home in one of the most symbolic spaces in the nation. The small settlement, christened Resurrection City, U.S.A., was even assigned its own zip code: 20013.<sup>22</sup>

The SCLC also worked with the National Park Service to secure a permit to occupy West Potomac Park and establish the infrastructure needed to support thousands of people for the weeks to come, including sewer, water, and telephone lines. During the month and a half occupation, demonstrators participated in marches and protests, most

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<sup>21</sup> Press Briefing by Stewart L. Udall, Robert L. Bennet, Reverend Ralph D. Abernathy, and his Aides, (May 1, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219, Poor People's Campaign," National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter cited as NARA), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Sylvie Laurent, *King and the Other America: The Poor People's Campaign and the Quest for Economic Equality* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 197; Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

notably Solidarity Day, a march of approximately 50,000 protesters whose presence was intended to pressure Congress to adopt an Economic Bill of Rights. Taking place on June 19<sup>th</sup> at the Washington Monument, the Solidarity Day protest included a march down Independence Avenue to the Lincoln Memorial. Organizers attempted to prolong the demonstration through the summer, but the NPS denied an extension of the permit. When the permit expired on June 23, law enforcement officers forcibly expelled the organizers. The campaign resulted in public backlash and a lawsuit against the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and it was unable to achieve tangible advances in securing economic rights for all Americans.<sup>23</sup>

Despite its ambitious goals, the Poor People's Campaign was deemed unsuccessful by government officials, members of the public, and even by civil rights activists themselves.<sup>24</sup> The perception of the campaign as a "debacle" still persists in contemporary rhetoric.<sup>25</sup> King's final demonstration is rarely referenced in scholarship on the Civil Rights Movement, and when it is, historians continue to refer to it as a "dismal failure."<sup>26</sup> Some scholars have begun to challenge this narrative, including Amy Nathan Wright and Sylvie Laurent, yet as Laurent notes, the dominant narrative describes the Poor People's Campaign as "divert[ing] the fervor for further civil rights to less fruitful

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<sup>23</sup> Laurent, *King and the Other America*, 199; "Permit," issued by Nash Castro to Reverend Ralph Abernathy and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, (June 12, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "Poor People's March," NARA.

<sup>24</sup> Laurent, *King and the Other America*, 9; Chuck Fager, a participant of the campaign, wrote that it "never succeeded in bringing about the desired confrontation with the federal government over the issues of poverty and public responsibility." Chuck Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection: Dr. King's Poor Peoples Campaign – 1968* (Durham, NC: Kimo Press, 2017), 108.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 275.

<sup>26</sup> McKnight, *The Last Crusade*, 141.

channels,” a trend that still persists.<sup>27</sup> This rhetoric, as espoused in contemporary scholarship, directly informs public interpretation (and by extension, public knowledge) about the campaign.

The 1968 campaign was, however, an example of how King and other leaders broadened the Civil Rights Movement and the broad-based unity and support for economic reform that King and his predecessors were trying to foster. Not only did the SCLC work across racial boundaries to unite disparate groups of Americans, it also sought to implement economic reform on numerous fronts. The shift in movement ideology that culminated with the Poor People’s Campaign is a significant part of the overarching history of the Civil Rights Movement, yet it is rarely studied in contemporary scholarship.<sup>28</sup> More broadly, the “dominant narrative of the civil rights movement” not only glorifies the leadership of some while marginalizing the presence of others, it also “distorts and suppresses as much as it reveals.”<sup>29</sup> Many of the misconceptions about the movement stem from early scholarship that relied on the selective media reporting.<sup>30</sup> Historians centered on the national implications of the movement and emphasized the contributions of the more visible leaders, including King and Abernathy.<sup>31</sup> Historian

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<sup>27</sup> Laurent, *King and the Other America*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Some scholars such as Douglas Sturm argued that that King’s increasing focus on economic equality was less a shift in movement ideology and more of a fulfillment of King’s lifelong mission to advance human rights of all Americans. Sturm argued that King’s socialistic ideals developed when he was in seminary school. Unlike most scholars who interpreted King’s vision for the Poor People’s Campaign as an abrupt departure from his focus on civil rights, Sturm contended that it was a natural progression of his collegiate training. Douglas Sturm, “Martin Luther King, Jr., as Democratic Socialist,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 18, no. 2 (1990): 79-105. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40015109>.

<sup>29</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005): pp. 1233-1263, 1233.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 1236.

<sup>31</sup> Steven F. Lawson, “Freedom Then, Freedom Now: The Historiography of the Civil Rights Movement,” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (April 1991), pp. 456-471, 456.

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall claims that this tendency to focus on the more famous demonstrations and “charismatic personalities (who were usually men)” obscures the complexities of the fight for Black freedom, which extends long before and after the popularly perceived Civil Rights era.

The trend to focus on the national leaders of the movement stems back to the 1970s and ‘80s when historians studied the influence of figures like Martin Luther King, Jr. Some of the most prolific works of this period include David J. Garrow’s *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (1986), Adam Fairclough’s *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King* (1987), and Taylor Branch’s *Parting the Waters: American in the King Years 1954-63* (1988). All three books address the prolific presence of Martin Luther King, Jr., yet they vary in scope and offer different interpretations on the nature of King’s role in the movement.<sup>32</sup> Of the three, Fairclough’s is most relevant to a study on the Poor People’s Campaign as it takes a more holistic approach to its interpretation of the Civil Rights Movement, yet Garrow’s *Bearing the Cross* and Branch’s *Parting the Waters* are often the primary books referenced when

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<sup>32</sup> Garrow and Branch, for example, offer more detailed accounts of King’s involvement with the SCLC as well as the role other national figures played in advancing political policy. In contrast, Adam Fairclough’s *To Redeem the Soul of America* is less reliant on original primary material, yet it provides an examination of King’s behaviors and public responses by studying his speeches, letters, and other personal papers. Unlike Garrow and Branch, who provide a thorough investigation into the people and events involved in the movement, Fairclough interprets the significance of the movement in the broader context of the social and political climate of the twentieth century. Most notably, *To Redeem the Soul of America* provides a more extensive analysis of King’s vision for the Poor People’s Campaign and how the national and international factors doomed the demonstration. Fairclough also examines the movement for Black liberation in the aftermath of Poor People’s Campaign, providing insight on how the struggle for Black equality proceeded in the wake of King’s death. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2006); Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference & Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1987).

studying the movement due to their extensive coverage of the topic material. *Bearing the Cross* was hailed by historian Clayborne Carson as “the most reliable study of King’s public career,” and won the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for Biography for its coverage of King’s life.<sup>33</sup> Branch’s *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* also received national recognition, winning the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for History as well as a number of other awards for its coverage of the Civil Rights Movement. Branch’s later books, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65* (1998) and *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years 1965-68* (2006) chronicled the Civil Rights Movement up through the late-1960s and continued to place King at the center of the narrative of the struggle. Despite Garrow’s and Branch’s extensive coverage of King and the movement, neither adequately addressed King’s shift in ideology and his inception of the Poor People’s Campaign. The authors also failed to elaborate on King’s legacy after his death; both *Bearing the Cross* and *At Canaan’s Edge* conclude with King’s assassination, implying that the Civil Rights Movement ended with his death. Neither Garrow nor Branch allowed for an analysis of how the fight for Black liberation continued after King’s death, implying that the Civil Rights Movement was dependent solely upon King’s leadership.

Garrow, Branch, and Fairclough established a foundation for the study of the Civil Rights Movement in the coming decades, and as a result, historians began to explore new lines of inquiry. Robert Weisbrot’s *Freedom Bound: A History of America’s*

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<sup>33</sup> Clayborne Carson, “King Scholarship and Iconoclastic Myths Reviewed: Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference by David J. Garrow; To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr. by Adam Fairclough,” *Reviews in American History* 16, no. 1 (March 1988): pp. 130-136, 130.

*Civil Rights Movement* (1990) and James R. Ralph, Jr.'s *Northern Protest: Martin Luther King, Jr., Chicago, and the Civil Rights Movement* (1993) build on previous work by focusing attention away from the influence King and the SCLC had in the southern campaign of the movement. While Ralph continues the tradition of examining the movement in context to King, he focuses on the civil rights leader's effort to bring greater attention to racial discrimination in northern cities after the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Ralph contends this strategy to draw national attention to the north revitalized the dying Black liberation movement in Chicago specifically. King's failure to maintain his attention on the discriminatory policies of the city was the result of his new initiative to organize another national protest, this time addressing poverty. Ralph suggested that "perhaps this evolution [in SCLC strategy] constituted an abandonment of Chicago..." yet the author also implied that the nature of the movement demanded King's attention elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> Despite covering King's later years, Ralph offers no interpretation of how the Poor People's Campaign fits within the SCLC's evolving strategy to reinvigorate the movement.<sup>35</sup>

Weisbrot's book examines the origins, successes, and decline of the Civil Rights Movement, studying other figures and organizations besides Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. While King and SCLC are a part of the book, Weisbrot focuses on how other organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) also informed the vision of the Civil Rights Movement. While the author addressed the

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<sup>34</sup> Ralph, Jr., *Northern Protest*, 225.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

SCLC's planning of the Poor People's Campaign, he divorced King from the demonstration by claiming that King would have likely called off the 1968 demonstration had he survived. According to Weisbrot, by March of 1968 "King himself had virtually stopped speaking about the march," and he argued that Abernathy pushed the fulfillment of the Poor People's Campaign "to show through bold, even reckless, action that the movement after King remained a powerful force."<sup>36</sup> His framing of the campaign as Abernathy's undertaking prevents King from being fully associated with the socialistic nature of the movement and its anticlimactic end. Weisbrot's writings propagated the myth asserted by modern society that King was politically moderate in his philosophy, a claim that is challenged in more recent scholarship.

By the early twenty-first century, historians began questioning the persistent misconception that the "civil rights movement reached its zenith in 1965, and thereafter rapidly declined."<sup>37</sup> Scholars such as Glenn T. Eskew and Timothy B. Tyson began focusing on how the movement operated on the local level and sought out the stories of less visible leaders.<sup>38</sup> One of the most influential works of the early twenty-first century,

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<sup>36</sup> Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound*, 272.

<sup>37</sup> Adam Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the War in Vietnam," *Phylon* 45, no. 1 (1984): pp. 19-39, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Southern historian Glenn T. Eskew, for example, complicates traditional interpretations of the Civil Rights Movement in his book *But For Birmingham: The Local and National Movement in the Civil Rights Struggle* (1997). Most historians cite the mid-1950s as the start of a national movement (due to the 1954 *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court decision and the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycotts); Eskew, however, examines acts of civil disobedience taking place on the local level long before the mid-twentieth century. The trend in boycotting busses extends back to 1954 when Rev T. J. Jemison led a series of bus boycotts in Baton Rouge, LA. Jemison and the Black community boycotted public transit and eventually succeeded in integrating public transportation in the city. Eskew also implies that despite the assumption of a concise timeline, the struggle for civil rights was an ongoing process since the days of slavery. Eskew also notes that while the 1950s denoted a more unified fight for equality, the SCLC was "without much purpose" until local activists from Birmingham helped create a more cohesive yet national movement in the early 1960s. Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 19. Other scholars also call the assumption of a monolithic movement into question. In his chapter "Dynamite and 'The Silent South': A Story from the Second Reconstruction in South Carolina," Timothy B. Tyson notes that while *Brown v. Board*, and the Montgomery Bus Boycotts

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall's article, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," disrupted the progress narrative of the Civil Rights Movement and prompted historians to consider how forces of power were at work in the crafting of the movement's legacy. She cautioned that by interpreting the Black movement for greater civil liberties as extending from 1954 to 1968, scholars erased "King the democratic socialist who advanced unionization, planned the Poor People's Campaign," and supported Memphis sanitation workers.<sup>39</sup> This chapter builds on Dowd Hall's theory and argues that even though King articulated calls for economic reform as early as in 1964, succeeding scholarship and federal legislation has resulting in a sanitized message that paints King, the SCLC, and the Civil Rights Movement as the work of moderate Americans who achieved their goals to vanquish racism. Later chapters of the dissertation delve into the dangers of framing the movement as one that succeeded in its goals, and it examines how federal authorities used their power and privilege to downplay the more radical aspects of the movement in its demands for economic reform, even as demands for wealth distribution and mass occupation protests in the capital continued into the twenty-first century.

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were "monuments to African American political perseverance and discipline," a unified movement was slow to coalesce due to "often violent 'massive resistance' by southern white supremacists." Tyson also challenges the assumption that the Civil Rights Movement did not revolve around King and his strategy of nonviolence; instead, local leaders throughout the south combated racism through the threat of violent retaliation. Instead of interpreting it as a movement for civil rights, Tyson uses the words of noted southern historian C. Vann Woodward to describe the phenomenon as "the Second Reconstruction." Tyson interprets the movement more as an effort of Black people and communities across the south working in unity to combat the violence of white society. Timothy B. Tyson, "Dynamite and 'The Silent South': A Story from the Second Reconstruction in South Carolina," in *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, ed. Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 276.

<sup>39</sup> Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," 1234.

The limited interpretation of the Civil Rights Movement as dating from the mid-1950s through the late-1960s (as propagated in most scholarship, public education, and political rhetoric) contributes to the obscurity of the Poor People's Campaign, as does the language used when referring to the movement. The phenomenon of African Americans demanding greater civil liberties in the mid-twentieth century is popularly referred to as the Civil Rights Movement as protesters demanded recognition of and protection for their individual citizenship rights, liberties that have been negotiated, denied, and renegotiated by the US government since its inception. To achieve this, the SCLC adopted strategies that emphasized proper decorum as a vehicle for inclusion. Protesters aligned their behavior with the standards of respectability politics to prove worthy of these civil liberties. Many demonstrators were well-dressed, middle-class African Americans who rejected violence despite the threat of physical assault. Through their demeanor, they intended to prove that they, like white society, were worthy of civil rights.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The adoption of respectability politics to advance a united Black front stems from the late-nineteenth century. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham explains that this ideology, as applied by middle and upper-class African American women "promoted middle-class ideals among masses of Blacks in the belief that such ideals ensured the dual goals of racial self-help and respect." These women believed that by behaving in a way that won the approval of white society, African Americans could earn acceptance to white institutions. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 14. This mentality persisted during the Civil Rights era as organizers sought to portray an orderly and respectable Black community deserving of the same rights as white Americans. The adherence to this doctrine of respectability is visible in the early days of the movement, before Rosa Parks refused to relinquish her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama city bus in December of 1955. In March of that year, fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin was dragged off a Montgomery public bus after she refused to move to the back. While some members of the city's Black leadership (including Rosa Parks) were supportive of Claudette's actions, others (such as E. D. Nixon, president of the Montgomery chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or NAACP) did not think Colvin was an appropriate figure to challenge the city's segregation policies due to her youth, "feisty" temperament, and her status as a poorer member of the Black community in Montgomery. That summer, Colvin realized she was pregnant, and any hope of challenging the public transit system vanished. Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 53-60.

In the wake of Dowd Hall's article, other scholars began challenging the sterile narrative of the Civil Rights Movement, including Southern historian Leon Litwack and Christopher Paul Lehman, professor of ethnic studies at Saint Cloud State University.<sup>41</sup> Only in the last fifteen years have a few historians devoted more attention to the Poor People's Campaign specifically. Before recently, scholarship on the campaign typically consisted of short analysis framed in context to King's earlier work for Black civil rights. Journalist Chuck Fager first published a comprehensive account of the campaign in 1969. As a participant in the demonstration, Fager's account was based on his own eye-witness testimony as well as a reliance on a number of newspapers accounts. He attested that during the campaign, "there [were] a multitude of things going on behind the scenes, some of them of possibly greater significance than many visible developments." The historic significance of the demonstration went unnoticed by activists, journalists, and scholars of the day, yet Fager predicted that the demonstration's "inner secrets [would] be exposed" when historians dedicated serious analysis to the nuances of the collaborative nature of the campaign.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Historians have long debated the timeframe of the Civil Rights Movement, with some (such as Dowd Hall) claiming that it extended to the social programs of the 1930s while others (including historian Leon Litwack) arguing that its origin lay when the first enslaved Africans arrived on the shores of the British colonies. Some experts in the field also contend that the movement extended long after King's assassination. Christopher Paul Lehman, for example, argued that while overshadowed by national and international events, including the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and the start of the women's liberation movement, the unified push for African American Civil Rights continued into the early 1970s. Lehman noted that while scholars accepted the end of the Civil Rights movement in 1968, key organizations such as the SCLC and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) continued to demand greater civil liberties -for Blacks and poor Americans-well after King's death. Leon F. Litwack, "Fight the Power! The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement," *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 1 (Feb, 2009): pp. 3-28; Christopher Paul Lehman, "Civil Rights in Twilight: The End of the Civil Rights Movement Era in 1973," *Journal of Black Studies* 36, no. 3 (Jan, 2006): pp. 415-428.

<sup>42</sup> Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection*, ix.

Decades passed without any new scholarship on the campaign, until historian Gerald D. McKnight published *The Last Crusade: Martin Luther King, Jr., the FBI, and the Poor People's Campaign*, still one of only a few sources on King's involvement in planning the campaign. McKnight's book is valuable as it examines how the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) surveilled and sabotaged King and the SCLC efforts to unite poor Americans. More recent scholarship, however, examines new facets of the campaign, from the role of local organizers in the District of Columbia, to studies of King's dual desire for both racial and economic equality. For example, in her article, "More than a March: The Poor People's Campaign in the District," Lauren Pearlman studies how the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's exclusion of the impoverished residents of the capital negatively influenced the campaign's outcome, and she argued that the "complexities of the Poor People's Campaign are best understood within the local context of Washington, D.C."<sup>43</sup> After the forced eviction of demonstrators and the eventual dismantlement of Resurrection City, SCLC organizers left the capital without any contingency plan, forcing local residents "to handle the campaign's remnants and repercussions – including increased tensions with local police department – in relative isolation."<sup>44</sup> According to Pearlman, the predominantly white organizers of the campaign did not take into account local factors, needs, and tensions, leaving poor residents of the local community in confrontation with law enforcement.

Sylvie Laurent's *King and the Other America: The Poor People's Campaign and the Quest for Economic Equality* (2018) examines the ideology behind the organizing of

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<sup>43</sup> Pearlman, "More than a March," 25.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 26.

the Poor People's Campaign and King's vision for "a loose association of the SCLC activists, Black Power dissidents, welfare rights women, socialist movements, and grassroots activists of various ethnicities."<sup>45</sup> Laurent describes how King recruited SCLC members to spearhead regional support and lead the poor of America to Washington, D.C. She makes the argument that economic justice was a central part of the Civil Rights Movement from the beginning; in fact, King was espousing ideas for an Economic Bill of Rights since 1964.<sup>46</sup> Less of a comprehensive analysis of the planning and execution of the campaign, Laurent's book examines how the campaign "clearly illustrated King's understanding that racial inequality was embedded in class."<sup>47</sup> She claims the campaign and its legacy are significant in the broader narrative of American protest as the demonstration prompted Americans to consider what rights were included the status of citizenship, specifically rights pertaining to earning a living wage and affording decent housing.<sup>48</sup>

McKnight, Pearlman, and Laurent add important analysis of the campaign, yet their work does not provide a full overview of the demonstration from its inception to its conclusion. The only scholarship dedicated solely to the study of the Poor People's Campaign is Amy Nathan Wright's 2007 dissertation "Civil Rights 'Unfinished Business': Poverty, Race, and the 1968 Poor People's Campaign." Wright claims that while a wealth of scholarship exists on the Civil Rights Movement more broadly, her dissertation is unique in that it offers "a comprehensive analysis of this significant yet

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<sup>45</sup> Laurent, *King and the Other America*, 148.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 98.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 22-3.

neglected movement and reveals the complexity of national, grassroots, multiracial, class-based activism.”<sup>49</sup> She draws from a number of primary resources, including collections at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Texas, the King papers and SCLC files at the King Library and Archives in Atlanta, Georgia, and the Archives of the Appalachians at East Tennessee University. In addition to manuscript collections she also relies on the Ralph Bunche Civil Rights Oral History Project based at Howard University in Washington, D.C., to cite oral history interviews of Poor People’s Campaign participants from Marks, Mississippi, the symbolic starting point of the demonstration where members of the Mule Train caravan began their journey to the capital.

Similar to Sylvie Laurent, Wright concludes that the 1968 demonstration was not a failure so much as it was an unfulfilled promise to secure greater economic freedoms for all Americans. Laurent and Wright recognized, more so than previous scholarship, that despite the campaign’s ability to garner support for immediate, tangible legislation addressing poverty, it marked a turning point in Civil Rights rhetoric and made Americans more aware of the pervasiveness of poverty in society. This body of work also examines the more contested aspects of the campaign, including demonstrators’ interactions with the US Park Police, and how this influences the NPS’s current interpretation of the landscape of the National Mall. The research that follows builds on the scholarship of Pearlman, Laurent, and Wright to study lesser-known aspects of the Poor People’s Campaign, including the involvement of the National Park Service and its

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<sup>49</sup> Amy Nathan Wright, “Civil Rights ‘Unfinished Business’: Poverty, Race, and the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign” (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2007), 20.

role in the processes of permitting the construction of infrastructure for Resurrection City.

Despite its influence in establishing broad-based support for economic reform as well as informing other social movements of the late-twentieth century, the Poor People's Campaign remains one of the most understudied demonstrations of the Civil Rights Era. Its marginalization from the story of American "progress" is the result of a number of factors, including a lack of scholarship and interpretation. The chaos of 1968, including the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, the protests and ensuing violence at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, and the events of the Vietnam War overshadowed the significance of King's last demonstration. The dominant narrative of the struggle for Black civil rights, reinforced by historians, frames the movement as beginning in 1954 (with school desegregation as a result of *Brown v. Board*) and ending in April of 1968 with King's death. The notion that the movement peaked in the mid-1960s (a claim reinforced by modern scholarship as well as current legislation) allows those in positions of power to erase King's later democratic socialist ideology from the movement's history.<sup>50</sup> As a result, King is further disassociated with the "failure" of the Poor People's Campaign and its radical demands, keeping his public

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<sup>50</sup> Hall explains how the "architects of the new Right," simplified the nuances of the struggle for racial equality, ignoring institutionalized oppression that continued to operate behind the curtain. Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights movement," 1236-8. The African American Civil Rights Network Act of 2017 gave the National Park Service permission to preserve and interpret Historic Sites relating to "the African American civil rights movement during the period from 1939 through 1968." This language is limiting as it omits reference to other stakeholders who participated in the later civil rights demonstrations, including those who participated in the Poor People's Campaign, and it excludes sites associated with the history of the movement dating after December 1968. The African American Civil Rights Network Act of 2017, Public Law 115-104, 115<sup>th</sup> Cong., (Jan 8, 2018), 3.

memory one of receptibility and civility, untainted by socialistic ideals that have long been demonized in American political rhetoric.

The lack of scholarship on the Poor People's campaign contributes to public misconceptions about King's life, skewing the historiography of social movements of the twentieth-century. The misrepresentation of the campaign and its relationship to the fight for African American civil liberties is not coincidental. As Hall notes, the conservative politicians and wealthy business and industry owners that she terms "the architects of the New Right," hijacked the dominant narrative of the movement and oversimplified its significance to diminish the power of African American stakeholders, to discourage grassroots organizing, and to propagate the myth that America had indeed achieved racial equality.<sup>51</sup> These figures used their access to the political process and financial capital to propagate what Michel-Rolph Trouillot refers to as "cycles of silence," referring to how the process of crafting a narrative requires access to power.<sup>52</sup> In his most famous work, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), Trouillot identified how power operates within the process of reproducing the past, allowing those recording, preserving, and interpreting the past the freedom to include and omit the stories they see fit – a practice apparent in National Park Service interpretation.

Trouillot theorized that during the process of reproducing the past, select figures and events were recorded while others omitted. These "silences" occur at different points in the process and are a direct result of the "uneven power in the production of sources, archives, and narratives."<sup>53</sup> *Silencing the Past* also suggested that the dominant historical

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<sup>51</sup> Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," 1236.

<sup>52</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

narrative is at its core a reflection of the prerogatives of people of privilege. The process of crafting the past is so powerful that it often goes undetected and unquestioned.<sup>54</sup> The marginalized of society have little-to-no control over how their past is remembered, and Trouillot's hypothesis, as applied to the historiography of the Poor People's Campaign, serves as a reminder to consider the agency of those excluded from participation in this process.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Start of the Campaign**

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference's planning of the Poor People's Campaign faced increasing challenges in March of 1968, and organizers knew they needed to put more effort into recruiting communities to participate in the caravans to the capital. Planning the demonstration was further complicated when King devoted energy to helping striking sanitation workers in Memphis, yet he viewed their struggle as a "microcosm [of] the Poor People's Campaign itself."<sup>56</sup> The rhetoric King used in his speeches supporting Memphis workers aligned their struggle with the broader mission to secure economic rights for all Americans, and as a result, the outcomes of the Memphis crusade became inextricably linked with the national perception of the Poor People's Campaign. The SCLC planned a peaceful demonstration in Memphis on March 28 to pressure city leaders to negotiation with strikers, but the march quickly became violent as young protesters vandalized and looted local businesses. The debacle provided the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>56</sup> McKnight, *The Last Crusade*, 51.

Federal Bureau of Investigation with the fodder it needed to cause public panic and pressure federal officials to consider canceling the impending Poor People's Campaign.

In the aftermath of the Memphis march, the FBI pressured local media outlets to paint King as inciting chaos and violence. The intelligence community also controlled the flow of information to government leaders. Studying FBI reports in the days and weeks following the Memphis march, Gerald D. McKnight concluded that "by artfully managing all intelligence reports channeled to the White House, top-level government officials, and congressional leaders, the bureau was in a position to influence opinions about King and the Memphis violence at the highest reaches of government." The FBI was able to convince elected officials that if King brought a group of protesting poor to Washington in the following months, similar outbursts of violence would surely ensue.<sup>57</sup> In the weeks that followed, Congress responded by attempting to enact new legislation to curtail public access to federal land to exercise First Amendment rights.

King returned to Memphis on April 3, determined to lead a peaceful march after the violence that occurred on March 28. The following day, on the evening of April 4, King was assassinated on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel. As news of King's assassination reached the District of Columbia on the evening of April 4, the streets erupted in violence. Chaos reigned in sections of the cities over the next few days, including in the Anacostia neighborhood in southeastern part of town, as well as in the central business district, along arteries such as 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Streets. Businesses and private residences were destroyed, and multiple people were injured and killed.<sup>58</sup> Despite the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>58</sup> Ben W. Gilbert, *Ten Blocks from the White House: Anatomy of the Washington Riots of 1968* (New York: Praeger Books, 1968); "Report of U.S. Park Police Activities in Connection with the Recent Civil

promise of the impending Poor People's Campaign that would fulfil King's last wish and bring awareness to crippling poverty, the African American community in Washington, D.C. was devastated by his assassination. Historian Dana Schaffer conducted oral histories with those who witnessed the riots in the capital, and she chronicled how Black residents "experienced a profound sense of loss - not only of King, but of hope, of patience, and, after the riots, of the physical fabric of many of their long-established and vibrant communities."<sup>59</sup>

The violence in the capital was not an anomaly. In response to King's assassination, African American communities in over 100 cities expressed their fury and grief by taking to the streets. The looting and vandalism that ensued was a physical manifestation of frustration and hopelessness felt by many Black Americans. The SCLC and Reverend Abernathy, who stepped into King's leadership role in his absence, had to contend with these outbreaks of violence while trying to reinvigorate fervor for the Poor People's Campaign. The riots also served to justify the FBI's claims that the SCLC and their planned demonstrations inspired violence, and in the month between King's assassination and the Poor People's Campaign, elected leaders in Washington were on edge. Before the campaign even started, many lawmakers and members of the public alike wrongly associated demonstrators with violent agitators who would achieve their demands at all costs.

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Disturbances," memorandum from Grant Wight to Nash Castro, (April 7, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219 Poor People's Campaign," NARA.

<sup>59</sup> Dana Lanier Schaffer, "The 1968 Washington Riots in History and Memory," *Washington History* 15, no. 2 (2003): 4-33, 6.

Government officials were also wary as few logistics had been established in the months leading up to the demonstration. While the SCLC planned to launch the demonstration on April 22, they still had not secured a site. To make arrangements for the demonstration and better articulate his demands, King contacted various cabinet heads and members of Congress just weeks before his death to arrange a series of meetings scheduled for mid-April. Corresponding with Frederick Simpich, the executive assistant and general counsel to the Department of Commerce, King expressed his “desire to speak to the Secretary of Commerce as well as the Secretary of Labor” during his upcoming visit to Washington, D.C. King intended to visit the capital with other members of the Committee of 100, a “multiracial coalition” composed of representative from the stakeholder groups participating in the campaign, including African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and poor whites.<sup>60</sup> Simpich, unsure of how to respond to King’s request, contacted the office of the Attorney General to ask for “the benefit of any advice [the Attorney General] could give him concerning how the Secretary of Commerce should respond to Dr. King.” This cross-communication between federal agency regarding the impending campaign was common as various branches of the government sought to present a united front and use policies and precedents to deter the SCLC’s plans. The Office of the Attorney General informed Simpich that “since Dr. King’s plans were still rather uncertain, [the Attorney General’s] plans were not crystalized at [that] time.” The Attorney General’s indecisiveness on how to handle King was most likely due to how little the government knew about the SCLC’s plans for the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 25.

campaign. The SCLC's seeming unpreparedness allowed time for the various branches of government to pursue strategies to prevent thousands of poor people from journeying to Washington, D.C.<sup>61</sup>

Abernathy and the SCLC postponed the demonstration from late April to early May, yet they continued King's work in the wake of his assassination, including keeping their plans to lobby Washington. The Committee of 100 arrived in Washington the last week of April to meet with members of Congress and cabinet officials.<sup>62</sup> Led by organizers such as Abernathy, Mel Thom, a noted Native American activist and co-founder and Executive Director of the Native Indian Youth Council (NIYC), and Corky Gonzales, a leader and organizer of the Chicano movement, the committee also included "witnesses" from each of the participating stakeholder groups.<sup>63</sup> The committee met with various federal agencies that were connected to the poverty epidemic, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Department of Labor (DOL).<sup>64</sup> This sojourn to the capital was intended to be the launch of the Poor People's Campaign, and Abernathy viewed it as a "test run" to "present Cabinet officers and government leaders with the PPC's demands."<sup>65</sup> The committee's trip was intended to grab the nation's attention, to present more detailed

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<sup>61</sup> "Department of Commerce Inquiry about Plans for Dealing with King Enterprise in April," memorandum from John R. McDonough to Deputy Attorney General Warren Christopher, (March 27, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219 Poor People's Campaign," NARA.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>63</sup> The press briefing refers to these non-leaders as "witnesses" when they spoke to appointed cabinet heads.

<sup>64</sup> Laurent, *King and the Other America*, 150. Wright, "Civil Rights 'Unfinished Business,'" 178.

<sup>65</sup> McKnight, *The Last Crusade*, 83.

demands to government leadership, and to put pressure on government officials to realize the vision of Martin Luther King, Jr. for an economic bill of rights.<sup>66</sup>

As intended, the committee's presence in Washington garnered national media coverage, both positive and negative.<sup>67</sup> This press coverage also had an impact on how government officials responded to the group of representatives, and they could not easily dismiss their presence in the capital. Delegates arrived in Washington on Monday, April 29, and over the next several days, they met with Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (a Democrat from Montana), Everett Dirksen (a Republican leader from Illinois), Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Robert Weaver and other cabinet secretaries.<sup>68</sup> Despite the committee's meetings with top cabinet officials, historian Amy Nathan Wright claimed that the group's visit to the capital was "short and inconsequential compared to the other caravans" that converged on Washington in the following weeks.<sup>69</sup> Despite Wright's claims, the committee's presence in the capital, and

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<sup>66</sup> Laurent, *King and the Other America*, 101-104.

<sup>67</sup> A paper in Salem, Oregon printed a story by Associated Press writer James R. Polk in which the former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Dr. Arthur Flemming, flew from Oregon to Washington, D.C., to meet with the Committee of 100. While supportive of the campaign's mission, Flemming did not support the organizers' tactics of disrupting the government. After waiting four hours "without lunch" to meet delegates, Flemming decided that meeting with the committee was not worthwhile and flew back to Oregon. James R. Polk "Flemming Flies to D.C., Back, Fails to See 'Poor March' Chiefs," *Stateman Journal*, (April 30, 1968). The *Southern Illinoisan*, an Illinois paper from Carbondale, printed a story by Associated Press writer Austin Scott describing how a Black businessman from New York, Dr. Thomas W. Matthew, was against the Poor People's Campaign as it advocated for welfare which "guarantee[d] permanent dependency" unlike "self-help which opens the door to independence." Austin Scott, "Negro Businessman Seeks Loan for Self-Help Plan," *Southern Illinoisan*, (April 28, 1968). On April 29, 1968, South Dakota newspaper *The Daily Republic*, based in Mitchell, SD, published an article by Associated Press journalist Joe Hall who described how the Committee of 100 kicked off the start of the Poor People's Campaign by lobbying leaders in Washington. Hall reported that Congress was unlikely to consider any new legislation to help the poor. The article also featured an interview with Mississippi senator John C. Stennis who suggested that if the campaign was allowed to continue, it would "set up further riots, lootings and burning within the capital city." Joe Hall, "No Broad New Programs To Aid Poor Are Expected," *The Daily Republic* (April 29, 1968).

<sup>68</sup> "'Poor People' Campaigners Get Red Carpet Treatment," *Clarion-Ledger*, May 1, 1968.

<sup>69</sup> Wright, "Civil Rights 'Unfinished Business,'" 193.

more specifically their interaction with Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, was an important moment in establishing the demonstrators' legitimacy in making indictments against the federal government and its role in causing mass poverty among specific groups of Americans.

Their brief lobbying in Washington was also a symbolic representation of the power of that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Committee of 100, and the Poor People's Campaign had in compelling the most powerful figures in Washington to sit down with controversial figures known for challenging the white patriarchal system. The significance of "poor" members of the dispossessed having the ability to meet with and address authority figures at the highest levels of the federal government should not be understated. The committee's meeting with the Secretary of the Interior, for example, was pivotal in asserting poor demonstrators' right to use public spaces for recreation and protest. Constituents had an opportunity to directly confront federal officials who represented the oppressive system. In its meeting with Secretary Udall, the Committee of 100 did not specifically comment on or ask permission to occupy the National Mall (a landscape cared for by the National Park Service, an agency of the Department of the Interior), yet a number of stakeholders, including Corky Gonzales, Mel Thom, and Tillie Walker, made demands concerning greater access to public lands for minority groups.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Udall, Bennet, Abernathy, and Aides, "Press Briefing," 2.

### **The Committee of 100 Meets with the Secretary of the Interior**

On the afternoon of May 1, the Committee of 100's final day in Washington, representatives gathered at the Department of the Interior building (located two blocks from the eventual site of Resurrection City on the National Mall) in an imposing auditorium with high ceilings and carved stone reliefs dating to the time of the building's construction in the 1930s. Meeting with Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert L. Bennett, Abernathy, Gonzales, Thom, Walker, and other representatives attempted to impress the direness of "the most serious problem in this nation...poverty."<sup>71</sup> Participants noted how the discriminatory policies of the DOI first impoverished minority Americans (through the mass seizure of Native and Mexican lands) and then punished them for their economic status by making landscapes inaccessible to those without the economic and social status to travel to and enter nationally treasured spaces. The delegation saw the Department of the Interior as directly responsible for the poverty of many Americans, and committee members noted the subtle yet impactful marginalization of people of color from National Parks and Historic Sites and raised grievances about the seizure of territory from Native Americans and those of Mexican ancestry.<sup>72</sup>

Mel Thom spoke on behalf of "those Indians who are not represented by the Indian power structure," informing Udall and Bennett that poor people living in urban areas did not have the means to relax at National Parks.<sup>73</sup> Thom demanded the creation of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 4. The involvement of Native Americans in the Poor People's Campaign and Thom's role in organizing is given significant attention in Daniel M. Cobb's *Native Activism in Cold War America*, (previously cited).

a “program for recreation for poor people in cities,” to provide them with the same opportunities as more affluent Americans.<sup>74</sup> Not only was Thom concerned with access to land, he also expressed frustration with the DOI’s attempts to assimilate American Indian children. For Thom, the DOI’s policies represented a threat to his people’s identity and culture through assimilationist tactics, such as the education of Native American children that often required the abandonment of tradition, culture, and language.<sup>75</sup>

Other participants accused the DOI of participating in what they interpreted as the illegal appropriation of Mexican territory. Political activists like Corky Gonzales understood the federal government’s seizure of land as a systematic way to oppress minorities. He informed Udall that even if poorer Americans did own property, they were often forced to “give away and sell away their land in order to gain some support for their children and themselves.”<sup>76</sup> Gonzales believed that America was “being turned into the playground for the affluent” with the gentrification of neighborhoods and beautification of landscapes delineating spaces only accessible to rich Americans. Speaking to the Secretary, Gonzales advocated for a rural renewal with an emphasis on farming that would discourage minorities from selling their land (the little capital they had) to seek work in cities.

The attention to accessibility and ownership of land as a signifier of wealth indicates that the Poor People’s Campaign represented a protest against more subtle yet systemic forms of racial oppression. In fact, committee members explicitly stated that the Department of the Interior had failed to protect the interests of minorities because it

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<sup>74</sup> Udall, Bennet, Abernathy, and Aides, “Press Briefing,” 9.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 28.

“operate[d] under a racist and immoral and paternalist and colonialist system.”<sup>77</sup> Notably, all committee members, African Americans, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, and poor whites-publicly expressed solidarity and support for one another in the fight to reclaim the land denied to them by the federal government.<sup>78</sup> Tillie Walker, one of the only women to speak during the meeting, emphasized the significance of the impending Poor People’s Campaign in terms of its unprecedented show of unity. She also informed the secretary of the difficulties she encountered when recruiting tribes to take part in the campaign. According to Walker, employees of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) actively discouraged Native participation in the campaign as tribes were told by local BIA superintendents that “Indians don’t do things like that,” implying that “Indians don’t work with Negroes in this country.” Frustrated with the message tribes received from the BIA, Walker informed the secretary that such behavior was a blatant form of “racism.”<sup>79</sup> Her testimony reveals how government employees at all levels and in different regions of the country worked against the success of the Poor People’s Campaign. Secretary Udall responded that employees who discouraged participation in the campaign went “far beyond their proper right.”<sup>80</sup>

Despite having the opportunity to address the Secretary of the Interior directly, the Committee of 100 did not request the use of the National Mall during the meeting, even though they still had not secured a site for the demonstration. While a seeming oversight on the part of the committee, a memorandum between the Deputy Attorney

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 16, 26.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 42.

General Warren Christopher and National Park Service Director of the National Capital Region reveals that the Department of Justice discouraged the SCLC leadership from addressing the question of a permit with Secretary Udall. The DOJ did, however, prepare Udall on how respond if such a question were asked. The secretary, eager to avoid discussion of a permit, was advised by Christopher to let “the SCLC make the first move on a camp site.”<sup>81</sup> While both DOI and NPS officials were aware of the impending campaign, they declined to take a proactive role in working with stakeholders who sought to use public space for the expression of political dissent.

### **Efforts to Secure a Permit for the Campaign**

As the Committee of 100 aired their grievances in Washington at the end of April, other organizers with the SCLC were still trying to secure a site for the demonstration. An analysis of government records, media reports, and secondary sources provides insight into how government officials made the decision to grant campaign organizers a permit to occupy West Potomac Park. On April 18, 1968 *The Washington Post* published an article entitled “U.S. to Deny Park Use for March,” in which Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall claimed “it would not be proper to turn parklands over to any group of people for permanent or temporary use for any kind of human shelter of any kind.”<sup>82</sup> The following day, NPS Director of the National Capital Region Nash Castro met with Reverend Walter Edward Fauntroy, a civil rights activist and the leader of the local

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<sup>81</sup> “Notes on telephone conversation with Deputy Attorney General Warren Christopher,” written by Edward Weinberg, (May 1, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA.

<sup>82</sup> Bernadette Carey, “U.S. to Deny Park Use for March,” *The Washington Post*, (April 18, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA.

SCLC chapter. Fauntroy informed Nash that SCLC organizers were “deeply concerned” with Udall’s remarks in *The Washington Post*, and despite the Secretary’s refusal to grant a permit, organizers still planned to bring masses of poor people to the capital. Fauntroy’s claims were validated by an article that ran several days later in *The Washington Post* announcing that 3,000 demonstrators would set up camp in the Mall, with or without a permit.<sup>83</sup>

Fauntroy became key in convincing officials to have the march in West Potomac Park on the National Mall rather than in outlying parts of the city, such as Anacostia. He and other SCLC leaders planned to camp in the city without a permit as they did not believe they needed permission from federal officials to use public land. The organizers of the Poor People’s Campaign chose Washington, D.C., specifically the National Mall, to be the location of a proposed “shantytown,” as this space was the gathering ground for the successful 1963 March on Washing for Jobs and Freedom.<sup>84</sup> Aware of the symbolic significance of the National Mall, Fauntroy leveraged his knowledge and familiarity of the local geography to convince officials such as Nash Castro and US Attorney General Ramsey Clark that this area of the city “was the safest place for such a demonstration because it was isolated from homes, businesses, and other areas of dense population.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Memorandum from Nash Castro to Edward Weinberg, April 22, 1968, record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “A8219, Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

<sup>84</sup> McKnight, *The Last Crusade*, 21.

<sup>85</sup> Pearlman, “More Than a March,” 29. Originally, SCLC wanted the protest to take place on the grounds of the Washington Monument, between 11<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> streets as this was a highly visible area of the National Mall. They were also motivated to choose this location due to existing infrastructure. According to Nash Castro, the area around the Washington Monument had better “availability of sewer and water lines than... West Potomac Park” where the demonstration actually took place. The existing infrastructure around the Washington Monument would have saved the SCLC a considerable amount of money. Castro did not explicitly state why the NPS was unhappy with this choice, yet he implied that occupying the land around the iconic monument would result in demonstrators “violating [NPS] regulations and risk arrest of their participants.” As a result, Castro and other representatives of the NPS and DOI “did [their] best to focus

He also used the persisting rhetoric propagated by the FBI that demonstrators were prone to erratic behavior to make a case for use of the iconic landscape at the center of the city. Referencing the violent Memphis march that occurred a few weeks earlier, Fauntroy advised Castro to grant a permit for the National Mall, a space located away from residential areas of the city.<sup>86</sup> Despite Fauntroy's logic, the Secretary of the Interior, who had ultimate authority over Castro and his role in approving permits, was against the use of park land for the purpose of the campaign. However, the local SCLC leader was able to argue his case to the Attorney General Ramsey Clark who directed the National Park Service to approve the permit, against the wishes of Secretary Udall.<sup>87</sup>

The exchange between campaign organizers and various agents of the executive branch provides a glimpse into the hierarchies of power at play and how agencies cooperated to deter organizers while disagreeing on how to best address the impending demonstration. Udall's capitulation to the Attorney General in granting a permit was not his only cause for concern; that spring, Congress actively worked to enact a slew of legislation aimed at stripping the Department of the Interior of its authority to grant access to public land in the District of Columbia. In March of 1968, Congress attempted to derail the Poor People's Campaign by requesting that the Department of Justice seek a court injunction to prevent the demonstration from taking place. President Lyndon B.

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[the SCLC's] interest in West Potomac Park." Fauntroy was adamant about the demonstration taking place on the National Mall and he threatened "to go to 'the Man,'" (Castro interpreted this to mean the President of the United States) to ensure the campaign's place on the National Mall. "Meeting with SCLC representatives," Memorandum from Nash Castro to Deputy Attorney General Warren Christopher, (May 8, 1968,) record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "Resurrection City," NARA.

<sup>86</sup> "'Poor People's Campaign' Status Report," Memorandum from Nash Castro to Deputy Attorney General Warren Christopher, (April 22, 1968,) record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "Resurrection City," NARA.

<sup>87</sup> Pearlman, "More Than a March," 29.

Johnson responded by denouncing this course of action as he “knew of no way to prohibit people who comply with the law from exercising their rights.”<sup>88</sup> The president’s words did not stop Congress from seeking alternative ways to discourage the campaign.

The National Park Service (and by extension, the Department of the Interior) had the authority to grant access to public lands via a permitting system, yet Congress expressed a desire to control this process when it proposed a series of resolutions to restrict the process of demonstrating and camping on federal property. Throughout the spring and summer of 1968, Congress pushed a series of bills that would strip the Department of the Interior of some of its authority to grant access to public lands in the capital. Other proposed bills would require permit applicants to pay a “bond to cover certain costs” when using public land in the District of Columbia.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Willard Cloptan, Jr., “President Rules Our March Ban,” *The Washington Post*, (March 31, 1968).

<sup>89</sup> The House Committee on Public Works (Chaired by George H. Fallon), and more specifically, the Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds proposed additional legislation to curtail access to public land in the District of Columbia for the use of protest, and their actions were a direct response to the proposed Poor People’s Campaign. The committee proposed over a dozen new resolutions to require a bond to hold a protest on federal land and strip the Department of the Interior of its role in granting permits for use of Federal land in Washington, D.C. “Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds,” Open Hearings, (May 6, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA. H.R. 13803, 14303, and 16627 would “require applicants for permits to parade in the District of Columbia or on property of the United States to post a bond to cover certain costs of such parades.” H.R. 13806, 13942, 14094, 14728, 16862 would “require persons holding demonstrations on Federal property or in the District of Columbia to post a bond to cover certain costs of such demonstration.” H.R. 13869, 13997, 16713, 16945, 16868 would “require an applicant for a permit to hold a demonstration, parade, march, or vigil on Federal property or in the District of Columbia to post bond to cover certain costs of such demonstration, parade, march, or vigil.” Memorandum to George Fallon, April 3, 1968, record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA. Additional legislation proposed (H.R. 1139, 1140, 1141, 1142, and 1143) would ensure that “no officer or employee of the United States or the District of Columbia shall authorize or otherwise permit the use of any real property of the United States or of the District of Columbia in connection with the housing or camping of persons participating in organized marches, sit-in, or other demonstrations in the District of Columbia.” Assistant Attorney General of Land and Natural Resources Division of the Department of Justice to Assistant Attorney General Frank M. Wozencraft, (May 7, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Poor People’s March,” NARA.

On May 6, the House Public Works Committee (the committee overseeing the proposal of the resolutions), held a hearing on the legislation. Both Nash Castro and Solicitor of the Department of the Interior, Edward Weinberg, spoke at the federal hearing on the DOI's role in facilitating access to federal land. In his testimony, Weinberg noted that the proposed "transfer [of] authority from the Executive to the Congress" in granting access to public land, would have the "effect not of relieving tension but of adding new stresses." According to Weinberg, the DOI already had an established precedent for managing landscapes in the capital since the founding of the National Park Service in 1916. He argued that there was already an existing legal structure to guide the DOI and the NPS in making decisions about the use of public lands in the capital, and he cited part 50, section 27 of the Code of Federal Regulations that stated that camping was permitted "in any areas designated for that purpose by the superintendent" of the region.

Responding to the House Public Works Committee's concerns of the impending Poor People's occupation of the National Mall, Weinberg reminded Congress that due to widespread construction in the city from 1921-1954, "a campground and trailer court were maintained in East Potomac Park" during that time period. He further stressed that the current permitting system "provid[ed] the government with a means of dealing in advance with possible uses of parks and parklands in connection with demonstrations and camping." Congress' proposal for blanket rules regarding public use of greenspaces in the capital would hinder the NPS from allowing demonstrations of free speech, ultimately "depriving the Government of its administrative options," which could be interpreted as

“a symbolic rejection by the Government of the United States of the right to peacefully assemble and petition for redress of grievances.”

Despite Weinberg’s testimony, the House Committee on Public Works issued a press release the following day stating that to address the “serious problem facing the Nation’s Capital” (referring to Poor People’s Campaign), the Congressional committee sought to move forward in amending one of the resolutions, H.R. 16981, to “limit the use of Federally-owned property in the District of Columbia.”<sup>90</sup> Over the next two days, leaders of the local SCLC chapter, including Fauntroy, met with Castro and other NPS and DOI officials to establish a site for Resurrection City and submit a permit. While the SCLC was still rather unorganized, Castro noted they were “quite distressed” that Congress was attempting to enact legislation restricting use of public land, which would in effect “foreclose the assignment of public land in the District of Columbia for the purposes [the SCLC] had in mind.” Organizers had to act quickly in order to secure a permit before any new legislation was ratified. On May 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, members of the National Park Service’s National Capital Region, Department of the Interior, General Services Administration (GSA), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and SCLC legal services, worked to establish the guidelines of a permit.<sup>91</sup> While the SCLC preferred to occupy the National Mall, specifically the area around the Washington Monument, other proposed sites included Anacostia, Rock Creek Park, and West Potomac Park.

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<sup>90</sup> “Joint Release,” by George H. Fallon, Chairman of the House Committee on Public Works, (May 7, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA.

<sup>91</sup> “Meeting with SCLC Representatives” Memorandum from Nash Castro to Deputy Attorney General Warren Christopher, (May 8, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA.

While the SCLC now had less leverage to negotiate for their desired site (the grounds of the Washington Monument) due to the proposed legislation from Congress, they were able to secure West Potomac Park just south of the Reflecting Pool, located between modern day World War II Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial. Despite the SCLC's ability to obtain a permit in the face of mounting pressure, Congress displayed a pattern of abuse in attempting to prevent the exercise of free speech in the nation's capital. While certain federal officials made it possible for the demonstration to happen — specifically President Johnson and his condemnation regarding the court injunction and Attorney General Clark Ramsey's forceful suggestion that the DOI approve a permit for the Mall — these individuals would not have been prompted to act if not for the persistence of organizers and demonstrators of the campaign and their devotion to making a physical presence in Washington, with or without government support. It also speaks to the importance local leaders and communities had in making the campaign possible. While national organizers contributed to the vision of the campaign, it was individuals like Tillie Walker whose recruiting efforts resulted in the support and participation of Native American tribes and Revered Fauntroy who used knowledge of the local landscape and political climate to make an argument for granting a permit for the demonstration.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> In 2017, University of California professor Ula Y. Taylor submitted an application to the National Park Service for a grant to interpret the history of the Black Panther Party. While Taylor's funding request was originally approved, the NPS reneged on its commitment to support the project on orders from the then Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke. Alexander Nazaryan, "National Park Service Refuses to Honor Black Panthers After Police Union Complains," *Newsweek*, (November 16, 2017), <https://www.newsweek.com/national-park-service-refuses-honor-black-panthers-after-police-union-702730>; Shelby Mayes, "Defunding Black Panther Research Infringes on Academic Freedom," *The Daily Californian*, (November 14, 2017), <https://www.dailycal.org/2017/11/14/defunding-black-panther-research-infringes-academic-freedom/>.

### **Birth of Resurrection City**

On May 10, 1968, the National Park Service issued a press release announcing the approval of the SCLC's permit "allowing the installation of tents" in West Potomac Park in the area "between 17<sup>th</sup> Street, the Lincoln Memorial, Independence Avenue and the Reflecting Pool." The permit, developed collaboratively by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Department of Justice, General Services Administration, city officials, representatives of the SCLC, and attorneys from NAACP, took effect May 11 and expired on the evening of June 16 and allowed a maximum occupancy of 3,000 people.<sup>93</sup> The National Park Service stressed that the "decision to grant a permit and a location were decisions of the government as a whole, not the unilateral act of [the] Department."<sup>94</sup> The permit required the SCLC to arrange the necessary infrastructure for the small city "at its expense," and organizers provided "toilet, bathing and washing facilities and dispose of waste." The SCLC also arranged and paid for electricity and telephone lines through the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company and worked with waste disposal companies for trash removal as they were required to "keep the designated areas in a reasonably neat and clean condition."<sup>95</sup> Castro was in close

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<sup>93</sup> "Department of the Interior News Release," (May 10, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219 Poor People's Campaign," NARA, 1.

"National Park Service Permit Granted National Christian Leadership Conference," Press Release, (May 10, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219, Poor People's Campaign," NARA.

<sup>94</sup> Memorandum from Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall to Congressman William C. Cramer, (May 24, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219, Poor People's Campaign," NARA.

<sup>95</sup> Cited from a letter from Nash Castro to Rev. Bernard Lafayette, Jr., National Coordinator of the Poor People's Campaign, (May 10, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219, Poor People's Campaign," NARA, 5. While there was widespread public concern that the SCLC and campaign participants were exploiting the opportunity to get free housing and services, the SCLC was paying for the services provided to Resurrection City. National Park Service records indicate that the SCLC did in fact pay the local businesses that set up the infrastructure of city. For example, in mid-June, Nash Castro confirmed with Pepco that SCLC paid a \$3200 bill "to energize the last unit of Resurrection City

communication with companies like the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company to ensure that SCLC paid for the services used.<sup>96</sup> The SCLC was also responsible for the removal of structures from Resurrection City and for restoring “the areas to their proper condition” after the demonstration.<sup>97</sup> To ensure the SCLC’s cooperation, the NPS required a \$5,000 deposit that could be forfeited if both organizers and participants did not adhere to the guidelines of the permit.

The SCLC was also required to submit a layout of Resurrection City to the National Park Service. The city was sectioned off into three areas (A, B, and C) with “Area A” encompassing the main residential section. “Area B” referred to the “paved platform on the west terminus of the Reflecting Pool” that served as a place for organizers to hold meetings during the evening hours. “Area C” was “adjacent to the Smithsonian Institution,” and was designated as an exhibit space. The Publicity Committee of the Poor People’s Campaign organized exhibits “for the purpose of informing the general public regarding poverty in the U.S.A. and regarding the objectives of the Poor People’s Campaign which is directed towards the eradication of poverty.” The exhibit was composed of text panels and images mounted on plywood that addressed poverty nationwide as well as housing and living conditions in Resurrection City.

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powerlines.” Memorandum from John R. McDonough to Attorney General Ramsey Clark, (June 19, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “A8219, Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

<sup>96</sup> Monte E. Fitch to William L. Rand, Assistant Manager of Coin Telephone Service of the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, (May 20, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “A8219, Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Nash Castro to Rev. Bernard Lafayette, Jr., National Coordinator of the Poor People’s Campaign, (May 10, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “A8219, Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA, 4.

Participants were to be stationed outside during peak hours to answer any questions from the public.<sup>98</sup>

The entrance to the city was located on the western edge where participants were required to register; they then received an SCLC campaign badge that allowed them to freely exit and reenter the site. Residential areas or “localities” were established based on state, city, and ethnic identity. Certain parts of the camp were designated for people hailing from New Jersey, Rhode Island, Mississippi, and California with smaller sections for protesters from Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo, and New York City. There was also a residential section for people from Appalachia as well as one for Native Americans. Each locality was composed of smaller neighborhoods of eight dwellings each.<sup>99</sup> Local architect and designer of Resurrection City John Wiebenson attempted to make the transition to the city smoother by creating two pre-fabricated shelter designs. As there was the expectation that families would participate in the demonstration, Wiebenson designed a “family model” as well as smaller four-person hut.<sup>100</sup> The city also had hygiene facilities, dining areas, schools, and day care facilities and was complete with fire lanes, security tents, medical units, a hospital, and other emergency response services, including tents set up by the city Health Department to provide free medical and dental services.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Request for permit from Vincent De Forest to Monte E. Fitch, (April 24, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA; Letter from Nash Castro to Rev. Bernard Lafayette, (May 10, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “A8219, Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA, 1-2.

<sup>99</sup> Willard Cloptan Jr., “Mall is Top Choice for March Campers,” *The Washington Post*, April 25, 1968.

<sup>100</sup> Memorandum from Nash Castro to Deputy Attorney General Warren Christopher, (April 24, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA.

<sup>101</sup> “Visit with Mr. Wiebenson,” Memorandum from Nash Castro to Deputy Attorney General Warren Christopher, record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA.

Safety was a major concern for all parties. The SCLC wanted to ensure the well-being of demonstrators and local and federal officials sought to avoid any more violence and vandalism as sections of the capital still remained scorched and destroyed after the rioting that took place in early April in the wake of King's assassination. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was responsible for ensuring the safety of Resurrection City, and in accordance with the permit, organizers appointed marshals, 56 men and 15 women, to patrol the grounds. While these marshals were responsible for maintaining an orderly environment in the city, the US Park Police (USPP), a law enforcement agency of the National Park Service, had jurisdiction and was responsible for addressing crimes committed within the city.<sup>102</sup> Officers were not, however, permitted to enter Resurrection City without being accompanied by appointed marshals. Records indicate that Park Police officers entered the city on 40 occasions, and only once without expressed permission.<sup>103</sup>

When the permit for the campaign was first issued, the US Park Police developed a plan for "police deployment," and "after considering the camp's populace and background," enlisted 15 officers to patrol the outer edge of the camp "for the best interest of the City." In a correspondence between Acting Chief of the US Park Police Grant Wight and Nash Castro, Wright openly acknowledged that he expected police

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<sup>102</sup> The US Park Police were responsible for addressing crime in Resurrection City, yet they failed to adequately respond to legitimate needs or law enforcement intervention, including in the case of a number of rapes that took place in May and June in Resurrection City. Several resulted in a "lack of prosecution" while others were ruled "unfounded." No one was arrested in connection with the series of rapes. These records show, however, that women who were victimized were trying to use the criminal justice system to press charges against their attackers. "Summary of Complaints Recorded by United States Park Police in Connection with Resurrection City, U.S.A. (Covering the Period May 11 to June 23, Inclusive, 1968)," record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219, Poor People's Campaign," NARA.

<sup>103</sup> Memorandum from Nash Castro to Wayne N. Aspinall, (July 3, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219, Poor People's Campaign," NARA.

officers “to be insulted and ... provoked.”<sup>104</sup> Wright’s reaction and expectation of violence aligned with a broader trend in US Park policing during that time period when, according to a NPS history of park police, “the stature of the nation’s police [rose] in reaction to the domestic upheavals of the late 1960s and early 1970s.”<sup>105</sup> The US Park Police found itself responsible for ensuring “law and order” during the most prolific protests of the twentieth century. The police chief likely anticipated conflict between officers and protesters due to their competing interests – the police as enforcers of guidelines that demonstrators sought to challenge. Participants of the Poor People’s Campaign were also diverse in terms of ethnicity as only 25 percent of participants were white.<sup>106</sup> In contrast, the US Park Police was a force of predominantly white officers, and it was not until the 1970s that women and people of color entered the force.<sup>107</sup>

The Secret Service also requested that the US Park Police have a presence around the White House during the campaign, and an additional ten officers were assigned to patrol the White House grounds. Chief Wright also assigned 15 officers to patrol the borders of Resurrection City to “relegate traffic, observe within, and [for the] prevention of intrusion.” An additional five to ten officers were assigned to accompany any participants traveling to parts of the capital outside of Resurrection City.<sup>108</sup> To further

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<sup>104</sup> “Report of Police Activities in Connection with the Poor People’s Campaign,” Memorandum from Grant Wright to Nash Castro, (June 29, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “A8219, Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

<sup>105</sup> Barry MacIntosh, *The United States Park Police: A History*, (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1989), 51.

<sup>106</sup> “Statistical Breakdown of Inhabitants of Resurrection City,” Thomas I. Herlihy, Director of Intelligence Division of D.C. Metro PD to John S. Hughes, Assistant Chief of Inspection Services, Memorandum, (June 20, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA.

<sup>107</sup> MacIntosh, *The United States Park Police*, 59.

<sup>108</sup> Memorandum from Grant Wright to Nash Castro, (May 24, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “resurrection City,” NARA.

ensure the safety of the residents of the District of Columbia, “8,000 federal troops, many of them Vietnam veterans, along with 1,800 D.C. National Guardsmen, were...alerted for possible duty.”<sup>109</sup>

While federal law enforcement was not welcome in the small city on the Mall, NPS officials had the authority to check in on the state of the site to ensure that the SCLC and demonstrators were abiding by the rules of the permit. Nash Castro in particular visited every few days, submitting detailed reports to the Department of Justice. Castro kept in close contact with various members of the SCLC leadership, informing them if there were potential problems. For example, after one visit in late May, he noted that the electrical lines in the camp needed to be raised in order to be up to code and to allow firetrucks to pass underneath. He also expressed safety concerns about participants burning trash and requested an explanation for the slow progress in installing showers.<sup>110</sup> Conditions in the camp worsened after a long bout of rain in late May and when Castro visited on May 29, he was “appalled” by the conditions, describing how heavy rain had turned the ground into “a sea of mud...about five inches deep.”<sup>111</sup> While Castro and other officials believed the site had become uninhabitable, SCLC organizer Anthony Henry commented that “campers [were] living in luxury compared to the 1932 Bonus Army.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection*, 16.

<sup>110</sup> “Visit to Resurrection City,” Memorandum from Nash Castro to Deputy Attorney General Warren Christopher, (May 26, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA.

<sup>111</sup> “Visit to Resurrection City,” Memorandum from Nash Castro to Deputy Attorney General Warren Christopher, (May 29, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “Resurrection City,” NARA.

<sup>112</sup> “Visit to Resurrection City,” Castro to Christopher, NARA.

While the intended design for Resurrection City was neatly arranged with established plans to build the necessary infrastructure, the actual progress of building the small city moved more slowly than anticipated. The rain hampered efforts to build trenches for new power and sewer lines, with many washing facilities not in operation until June. Despite the rough state of the settlement, people continued to arrive. Similar to the Bonus Army demonstration, men, women, and children made their way in caravans from all across the country, converging on the capital to make a political statement. While the Bonus Army was seemingly less organized, the veterans were more successful in leveraging the power of the media to amplify their message. SCLC leadership failed to effectively use the media to their advantage and the public perception of the campaign was largely a negative one. Campaign participant Chuck Fager attributed this in part to rhetoric espoused by the FBI and Congressmembers who gave interviews to news outlets, citing the communistic ties of campaign organizers and the potential for violence on the part of demonstrators. Fager also blamed the lack of positive press to how Resurrection City marshals treated reporters as he witnessed marshals “barking orders, first to the marchers not to talk to the press, and then at the press to go away and stop taking pictures.”<sup>113</sup>

### **The Fall of the City**

Participants of the Poor People’s Campaign were originally permitted to set up shelter in West Potomac Park until June 16, yet on June 12, the SCLC filed a petition to extend the permit. Two days later, Castro sent a letter to SCLC organizers informing them that their

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<sup>113</sup> Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection*, 17.

extension had been approved; the Poor People's Campaign could continue to occupy the site through June 23 at 8pm.<sup>114</sup> The refusal of the NPS and DOI to extend the permit beyond June 23 signaled the death knell of the campaign. Demonstrators had until 8 o'clock in the evening of June 23 to gather their belongings and vacate the premises. Discouraged by the lack of tangible gains, many protesters refused to leave with the expiration of the permit and would only move "by forcible ejection or arrest."<sup>115</sup> Abernathy had expressed such sentiments to demonstrators "again and again," encouraging them to have a presence on the Mall even after the permit expired. As federal law enforcement prepared to move in, campaign organizers feared potential outbreaks of violence.<sup>116</sup>

On the morning of June 24, Abernathy gave a public speech declaring his intention to stay in Resurrection City until issues of poverty were addressed by the cabinet secretaries and Congress. He then led a group of marchers to the Capitol Building where Capitol Police Chief John Powell blocked their entry to the grounds. As Abernathy and others sat in protest, they were arrested on the spot. In Resurrection City, over 1,500 police officers surrounded the premises and entered to arrest the over 100 people left, including Hosea Williams who continued signing "freedom songs."<sup>117</sup> With Abernathy, Williams, and other leaders in jail, the remaining members of the SCLC still expressed

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<sup>114</sup> Nash Castro to Congressman Wayne N. Aspinall, (July 3, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219, Poor People's Campaign," NARA; Nash Castro to Southern Christian Leadership Conference, (June 14, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219, Poor People's Campaign," NARA.

<sup>115</sup> Letter from Richmond F. Allen, Acting Solicitor of the Department of the Interior to US Attorney General Ramsey Clark, (November 20, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "A8219, Poor People's Campaign," NARA.

<sup>116</sup> Fager, *Uncertain Resurrection*, 86.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 88-89.

optimism about their plans to pressure Congress to address issues of poverty, and a few caravans continued to arrive in the following days, but US Park Police, Capitol Police, and District of Columbia Metropolitan Police succeeded in preventing large scale demonstrations and quietly made arrests.

The SCLC's attempt to keep the campaign alive was not at the forefront of national attention; instead, in the following weeks and months, government officials and members of the public focused on the cleanup of Resurrection City and the high cost to remove debris and restore the landscape. According to the terms of the permit issued by the National Park Service on May 10, the SCLC agreed to remove structures and personal property from the site after the expiration date. In case the SCLC did not abide by this stipulation of the permit, Nash Castro informed Congress that he "believe[d] the \$5,000 cash deposit made by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference ...[was] sufficient to cover the removal of facilities installed by them on park land in the District of Columbia." Castro further assured members of Congress that the lumber used in erecting structures in Resurrection City was valuable enough to "attract private salvage firms." The SCLC had also made a \$7,850 deposit to PEPCO for the installation of powerlines, which included the cost of removal. As a result, Castro believed that the overall cleanup of the site (even without SCLC's participation) would be "at little or no cost to the Government."<sup>118</sup> After the conclusion of the campaign, however, the cost of the police presence, installation and removal of infrastructure, and general cleanup estimated in the hundreds of thousands. The cost of paying the US Park Police throughout the duration

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<sup>118</sup> Letter from Nash Castro to Congressman Robert C. Byrd, (May 24, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder "Resurrection City," NARA.

campaign (including overtime) totaled \$144,989 alone. The SCLC also hosted a “Solidarity Day” demonstration on June 19, consisting of a series of speeches and marches in the city. The cost of police and cleanup for the march came to \$14,607.

The National Park Service was not the only entity concerned over cost of the demonstration; the General Services Administration paid for the removal of private property from West Potomac Park and covered the cost of its storage which totaled approximately \$29,482.<sup>119</sup> The District of Columbia Department of Traffic and Highways removed lumber and other debris from the city for the cost of \$26,009, and was anticipating repayment from the National Park Service. Castro later informed the city government that the NPS had “no funds” to pay for the cost of cleanup.<sup>120</sup> The NPS later claimed that it “called on” the assistance of GSA and the city government to assist in cleaning up Resurrection City, yet “No mention was made at the time that [the NPS] would plan to reimburse those agencies.” Castro claimed he “thought that [GSA and the local government] would take care of their own expenses...just as [the NPS was] doing.”<sup>121</sup> In total, the cost campaign amounted to roughly \$275,600.<sup>122</sup> The National Park Service requested that the SCLC cover some of the costs by repaying the GSA for removal and storage of personal property, the local Department of Traffic and Highway for lumber removal, and the National Park Service for cleanup, and other miscellaneous costs including tree and shrub repair and replacement of fences and benches, totaling

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<sup>119</sup> Memorandum from Nash Castro to Congressman Robert C. Byrd, (August 30, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “A8219, Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

<sup>120</sup> T.F. Airis to Nash Castro, (August 7, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “A8219, Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

<sup>121</sup> “Demolition Costs, Resurrection City, USA,” William S. Bahlman to NPS Director, (August 14, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 9, folder “A8219, Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

<sup>122</sup> Memorandum from Castro to Byrd, August 30, 1968, NARA.

\$71,795. When the SCLC refused to pay, the NPS enlisted the assistance of the Department of Justice to sue organizers for payment.<sup>123</sup>

Public letters of complaint flowed into the Department of the Interior over the next several months with members of the public expressing concern over use of public land by “poor” people along with words of frustration at the SCLC’s refusal to pay the National Park Service. Many letters expressed outright racism against both African Americans and Native Americans and their legitimacy to confront federal authority. A woman from Leavittsville, Ohio, for example, referred to the campaign as a degradation to the capital city.<sup>124</sup> To many, the SCLC’s obtainment of a permit to occupy West Potomac Park seemed like a form of favoritism, and one man from Tulsa, Oklahoma wrote to his Congressional representative: “just because a person is black he is to be given something for nothing,” indicating a lack of knowledge about structural racism and ignorance of the diverse number of stakeholders participating in the Poor People’s Campaign.<sup>125</sup> The “us versus them” mentality was also prevalent in the slew of correspondences to congressional representatives. A man from Texas wrote to Congressman John Tower to express concern over demonstrators “destroying...our property in Washington,” implying that he, not the demonstrators, had ownership over that space. His comments also indicate his belief in curtailing access to public space from those deemed “unworthy,” in this case, poor Americans and people of color.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Letter from Mrs. Clifford Nippell to Secretary Udall, (May 15, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 5, folder “A3615: Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

<sup>125</sup> Letter from R. L. Snyder to Congressman James Smith, (N.d.) record group W079-72A6215, container 5, folder “A3615: Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

<sup>126</sup> Letter from Minister Leonard Mansen to Congressman John Tower, (May 15, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 5, folder “A3615: Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

Most letters addressed to members of Congress or the Secretary of Interior were well-written and demonstrated a level of decorum, yet one individual from Florida used his letter to Secretary Udall to send a message about his feelings toward demonstrators. This individual addressed his letter to “Great White Chief” (Secretary Udall) and stated: “Me, Chief Sad Bull, Cherokee Indian wantum take vacation” to the capital to “Bringum Squaw and papooses to pitchum teepee” by “Tall Chief, Lincoln.”<sup>127</sup> The letter, signed “Sad Chief Bull Dozier” was a statement about the over 200 Native Americans who took part in the campaign, including women, children, and college students.<sup>128</sup> This correspondence in particular indicates that despite the SCLC attempts to bring greater awareness, the Poor People’s Campaign and its participants served as a topic of mockery to many Americans.

### **Conclusion**

King’s vision for the Poor People’s Campaign and its potential to bridge centuries old racial divides and unite poor Americans across the country has been understudied and under-recognized. The Civil Rights Movement is, as a result, framed by historians around race despite King’s attempt to align the movement with class-based struggle. More attention to the Poor People’s Campaign is needed to understand it as an evolution of the Civil Rights Movement and how it empowered future social movements, including the American Indian Movement, the second wave of feminism, the Chicano Movement, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) civil rights movement. By

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<sup>127</sup> Letter from “Chief Sad Bull Dozier” to Secretary Udall, (May 17, 1968), record group W079-72A6215, container 5, folder “A3615: Poor People’s Campaign,” NARA.

<sup>128</sup> Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America*, 148.

promoting the participation of poor people of diverse ethnic backgrounds, the Poor People's Campaign directly informed other social movements, particularly as noted leaders from other minority communities participated in the campaign. Omitting the Poor People's Campaign from scholarly work on the Civil Rights Movement serves to isolate the movement rather than interpreting it as the beginning of a continuous push for greater civil liberties for American with marginalized identities.

Racism and classism were a persistent problem in American society in the late 1960s, with Americans arguably more divided than in previous years. Kings death spurred the realization of the Poor People's Campaign, and while the SCLC became "bogged down in running a city," the demonstration was a realization of what unity among stakeholders could accomplish together.<sup>129</sup> It was an intentional statement of solidarity against hierarchies of power working within the federal government to marginalize its own citizens. By challenging federal authority, participants were reclaiming power for themselves as individuals and for those marginalized peoples they represented. By addressing government sanctioned racism and discrimination, participants disrupted systems of power by questioning the ability of federal authorities to authentically work with stakeholders who were disadvantaged by discriminatory policies and behaviors. The SCLC also negotiated their First Amendment right to free speech and leveraged a place on the National Mall to make their presence known to the nation.

By focusing on what the Poor People's Campaign failed to achieve, scholars have erased its significance in bringing together marginalized Americans toward a specific

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<sup>129</sup> McKnight, *The Last Crusade*, 107.

cause. Their ability to execute the campaign in the face of the adverse conditions is a testament to resolve of the protesters and commitment to each other and to the vision of Martin Luther King. As King articulated in the weeks before his death, “when you stand up for justice, you can never fail.” Interpreting and recognizing the campaign as important part of a shared American story is essential in celebrating the act of protest as a true reflection of our democracy.<sup>130</sup>

Looking at interactions between NPS officials, NPS law enforcement, and protesters demonstrates the different perspectives and agendas of each, suggesting a path for historic interpretation of these events through each of these divergent lenses. Examining federal responses to demonstrators’ attempts to win greater economic rights and make their struggles known before the nation offers a roadmap for how the National Park Service can more fully recognize stakeholders’ voices in the retelling of the past. As steward of much of the greenspace in the capital, the National Park Service had (and continues to have) an important role in facilitating public access to such spaces for the purpose of exercising First Amendment rights to free speech. While officials at the NPS eventually worked with organizers, the DOI (on advice from the Department of Justice) tried to avoid engaging the SCLC on the topic of securing a permit. Under pressure from federal agencies and Congress, the DOI risked losing its authority to grant access to public lands in the District of Columbia and ultimately worked with the SCLC and other parties to establish a permit for the Poor People’s Campaign, to take place in West Potomac Park. This story of federal reactions to and interactions with the Poor People’s

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<sup>130</sup> King, Jr., “The Other America” in West, *The Radical King*, 240.

Campaign is messy and complicated but these stories must be included in our nation's past.

## CHAPTER V: THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AND INTERPRETIVE PRACTICE

The tradition of holding public protests in Washington, DC remains an important part of U.S. citizens' freedom of expression and assembly, and earlier demonstrations including the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign were crucial in exercising and safeguarding these rights for future demonstrations. Today, demonstrations, rallies, and parades remain an integral part of the capital city's identity, with protests such as the Women's March on Washington (January 2017) and the People's Climate March (April 2017) attracting national and international attention. The Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign intended to hold the government responsible for addressing poverty through the occupation of public lands, creating a specific method of protest that is still used today.<sup>1</sup> These two demonstrations laid the foundations for later movements, including Occupy D.C., a protest against the growing wealth disparity in America in which protesters camped in McPherson Square in the Washington, DC central business district from October of 2011 through January of 2012. Using their bodies to occupy visible,

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<sup>1</sup> While earlier demonstrations were important in informing public protest, Coxey's Army was the only notable occupation before 1932 (described in more detail in chapter two). Demonstrators spent several weeks camping out in various parts of the city, and while historian Lucy Barber claims that this was the "the first real march on Washington," the cause of the demonstration was in a sense delegitimized after the leaders were arrested for trying to access and make speeches on the steps of the Capitol Building. This demonstration established rhetoric about citizenship and access to resources that was later adopted by both the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign. The Bonus Army occupation marked a notable departure from Coxey's approach; veterans sought to use their presence not only to pressure lawmakers, but also garner public sympathy - something they needed in order to successfully achieve their demands. A number of veterans demonstrated their desire for public support by bringing their wives and children with them to Washington (in part to discredit claims that they were homeless vagrants). They also established their own newspaper to tell their side of the story, and organizers allowed members of the media into the makeshift camps. Similarly, the Poor People's Campaign sought to portray a favorable public image. While individual marshals (private citizens appointed by the SCLC to patrol Resurrection City) were often confrontational with members of the media, organizers of the campaign actively worked to establish good relations with the public, as demonstrated by the educational exhibits set up outside the small city. Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 11.

public spaces, protesters engaged in a direct expression of democracy, one guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution.

Legally, however, protesting on public land requires more than the rights of citizenship. Federal public land in the United States is managed by several federal agencies, the Department of Interior, Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, and the Department of Defense. The majority is overseen by four agencies within the Department of Interior and Department of Agriculture, including the National Park Service.<sup>2</sup> The laws regarding access to public land vary, and in the case of the National Park Service, a permit is required to march, protest, and occupy park units. With the NPS managing public spaces in Washington, the agency oversees the process of granting permits for public assembly (as was the case during the 1968 Poor People's Campaign). But as explained earlier in this body of work, the NPS did not always retain authority over the capital's civic spaces. It was not until the 1930s under Franklin Delano Roosevelt's leadership that the NPS expanded its mission from protecting (predominantly) natural landscapes to managing historic sites, specifically forts, battlefields, and Indigenous cultural sites. The National Park Service's acquisition of these units is relevant when considering its involvement in occupation demonstrations; at the time of the Bonus Army occupation, the Anacostia flats were under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers, but the NPS assumed responsibility for the park less than a year after the US Army forcibly expelled the veterans.

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Federal Land Ownership: Overview and Data*, by Carol Hardy Vincent, Laura A. Hanson, and Carla N. Argueta, R424346 (2017): 1-25, 1-2.

Expansion of the agency's mission over the course of the twentieth century changed not only operations within the NPS; it fundamentally altered history in practice, contributing to the divide that developed between those engaged in the application of historical research and scholars within the academy. It also helped spur the professionalization of public history. When the NPS took charge of over sixty cultural and historical sites in 1933, it was unprepared for how to frame these places within the context of its own identity as a natural steward. The agency had only recently (as of 1931) identified "history" as a "clearly defined arena of NPS work," despite its management of "nature" parks with rich Indigenous pasts, such as Mesa Verde and Casa Grande.<sup>3</sup> As NPS bureau historian John Sprinkle notes, before 1931, "the agency did not employ a single professional historian."<sup>4</sup> The agency transformed into a steward of post-colonial as well as precolonial cultural resources almost overnight, prompting it to establish "a 'new field' of historical technicians fostered by the creation of the first federally supported history office."<sup>5</sup> It was not until National Park Service Director Horace Albright hired Verne Chatelain as the first Chief Historian in 1931 that the agency gave its historical sites serious consideration.<sup>6</sup> While academically trained,

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<sup>3</sup> Anne Mitchell Whisnant, Marla R. Miller, Gary B. Nash, and David Thelen *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service*. (Bloomington, IN: Organization of American Historians, 2011), 20. The mentality that Indigenous sites were somehow outside of the scope of American history has been a problematic, yet enduring perception in the NPS—now challenged by the movement to decolonize cultural resources. Archaeologists rather than historians were tasked with managing these sites as early NPS historians typically focused on more recent history of the American Revolution, Civil War, etc. "Archeology Nationwide," Archeology Program website, National Park Service, accessed October 27, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/archeology/sites/nationwide.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> John H. Sprinkle, Jr., *Crafting Preservation Criteria: The National Register of Historic Places and the American Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2014); 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Preservation Comes of Age*, Vol. II (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 926.

Chatelain's job was to create historical education for cultural sites in NPS, and he planned to implement "a new interpretive program designed to illuminate and quantify the nation's history."<sup>7</sup>

Surveying a number of parks across the country, Chatelain found no existing programs from which to model his vision for historical education, yet he recognized the history office's potential to "harness historical research and education as a tool for transforming a rather disconnected group of regionally significant places into a truly national collection."<sup>8</sup> Using the power of historic properties to enhance national identity, Chatelain created a procedure to evaluate the significance of proposed sites.<sup>9</sup> Intent on creating a national framework for interpretation, Chatelain required park units to "disseminate accurate information in an interesting manner," encouraging them to frame the history of their units as part of broader national story (an approach current NPS leadership also encourages).<sup>10</sup> Through the collaboration of Albright and Chatelain, historical interpretation became a mainstream division within the agency, and the "educational goals of the Park Service historians...dominated the last half of the depression decade."<sup>11</sup> The agency began to develop a tradition of historical interpretation, meaning it created a more structured framework for developing historical content intended for the public.

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<sup>7</sup> Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), xxviii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>9</sup> Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age*, 926.

<sup>10</sup> Barry MacIntosh, "Chapter 2: Branching into History," in *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1986), accessed October 20, 2019, [https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/mackintosh2/branching\\_inagurating.htm](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/mackintosh2/branching_inagurating.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age*, 926.

The new focus on historic preservation was a logistical challenge, yet it also influenced the professionalization of historic preservation more broadly and informed the burgeoning practice of applied (or public) history. According to Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., a notable historian who specialized in the disciplinary history of the preservation movement, the National Park Service's stewardship of historic sites required it to employ a number of historians and architects in the 1930s during a time when it was the only institution hiring in the field.<sup>12</sup> After the passage of the Historic Sites Act in 1935, which enabled the agency to take a more active role in preserving historic properties, the National Park Service also assumed responsibility for identifying nationally significant buildings and sites, further solidifying the need for historians, architects, historic preservationists, and (what we would recognize today as) public historians.<sup>13</sup>

During his tenure, Chatelain was still one of only a few historians in the NPS, and he found it difficult to navigate and build a cohesive national program, especially as historians began to accept other positions as museum curators and preservationists.<sup>14</sup> While Chatelain envisioned NPS historians as content experts adept at communicating complex ideas to the public, the field of history more broadly was divided over the issue of practice versus scholarship. While Chatelain was embracing a discipline that entailed both academic research and public education, academic historians were distancing themselves from practitioners (including those employed at museums and historic sites). In the decades since the professionalization of the discipline in the late-nineteenth century, historians relied on historical documents while other forms of evidence of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 873.

<sup>13</sup> Sprinkle, *Crafting Preservation Criteria*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 99-100.

past, including material culture, built landscapes, and oral storytelling were largely the purview of anthropology, historic preservation, and folklore studies. As prominent scholars largely “rejected an object-based history and refined instead historical methodologies rooted in retrieval and critical analysis of documents,” they distanced themselves from the applied history Chatelain had hoped to pilot in the NPS.<sup>15</sup> While the “learn by doing” approach was not new when Chatelain joined the NPS, it was still not an accepted methodology and it created dissonance between more traditional scholars and historians in the NPS.<sup>16</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century, NPS leadership concentrated efforts on better defining the scope of historical education and interpretation in park units. Freeman Tilden’s publication of *Interpreting Our Heritage* increased attention on the practice of interpretation as did the establishment of a Service School in Yosemite National Park in 1957.<sup>17</sup> As educational interpretation was becoming a more established discipline within the agency, the federal government passed the National Historic Preservation Act (1966) which refined the role of NPS historians. The act created the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the “ official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of

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<sup>15</sup> Steven Conn, “Objects and American History: The Museums of Henry Mercer and Henry Ford,” in Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926*, 151-92 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 151.

<sup>16</sup> In 1896, Dewey and his wife created an experimental school at the University of Chicago incorporating interaction with objects and the “learn by doing” approach that later became an essential characteristic of modern museum programming (and public history more generally). Marjorie Schwarzer, “Introduction.” in *Riches, Rivals and Radicals: 100 Years of Museum History* (Washington, DC: American Association of Museum, 2006), 9.

<sup>17</sup> The Service School in in Yosemite National Park was eventually replaced by the Horace N. Albright Training Center in Grand Canyon National Park, AZ and the Stephen T. Mather Training Center in Harper’s Ferry National Historical Park, WV. Barry MacIntosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective*, (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1986).

preservation” that operates as “part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.”<sup>18</sup> Heralded as one of the most influential pieces of preservation legislation, the act also established State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and set forth guidelines under section 106 requiring assessment of potential outcomes when building on federal land or when using federal funds in development.<sup>19</sup>

In the following years, NPS historians devoted their attention to assessing properties nominated to the National Register, and they became less involved in creating interpretive content, which caused a divide between trained historians and field interpreters that still exists today. The National Historic Preservation Act exemplified the power the NPS wielded in informing national policies and shaping public consciousness about the past, denoting the significant role the agency had come to play in the stewardship of natural and historical sites across the country.<sup>20</sup> By the late twentieth century, however, personnel in the agency began recognizing the disconnect between practitioners and the antiquated nature of its content, and they spent the past several decades seeking to find relevancy leading up to and beyond the agency’s centennial in 2016.

With historians preoccupied with more bureaucratic tasks, such as assessing historic properties eligible for the NRHP, the responsibility for creating educational content fell to other personnel in the NPS, including naturalists and seasonal rangers. Those creating

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<sup>18</sup> “National Register of Historic Places,” National Register of Historic Place website, National Park Service, accessed October 27, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/index.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> John Sprinkle, Jr., *Crafting Preservation Criteria*, 6; *Federal Historic Preservation Laws*, (Washington, DC: National Center for Cultural Resources, 2002), 34-98.

<sup>20</sup> Whisnant, *Imperiled Promise*, 11.

historical interpretation were not necessarily trained in the process of historical research, causing the quality of interpretation to decline. In the following decades, those employed as historians were typically no longer involved in creating programs or content for the public, causing a distinct separation between those conducting historical research and those interacting with the public. As a result of the divorce between historical research and practice, reviewed below in this chapter, the complexity of the past was (and continues to be) lost in translation at many park units.

Today, interpretive rangers do not need a history degree (or any historical training) to create programs for the public. This is problematic as these rangers are often the only members of the NPS that visitors encounter on their trips to parks. The interpretive ranger is, by extension, the face of the agency, often the only personnel providing the “official” version of the history of their site. But that history can be inaccurate or exclusionary due to the interpreter’s lack of historical training and research skills. Even those interpreters trained as historians can produce inaccurate and exclusionary interpretations. Rangers on the National Mall (one of the most visited units in the NPS) admit that the process for creating programs is quite lax. At many parks, the most authentic and inclusive interpretation was created by rangers who were content experts, trained in subject matter. Due in part to this divide, the National Park Service has understudied protests and larger social movement that have occurred on the lands it maintains, including the Bonus Army and Poor People’s Campaign. As stated in previous chapters, there is limited scholarship on these two demonstrations, and locating and exploring these resources takes a level of training and knowledge that many interpreters are not equipped with.

The NPS adopts a place-based approach to the past; interpreting the histories of America's cultural landscapes is not only within its purview, but is a core tenet of the NPS mission.<sup>21</sup> The divide between scholarly, historical research and public engagement is therefore an ongoing and serious challenge as the agency embarks on its second century, one that directly affects the diversity and quality of stories interpreted within the National Park Service. This chapter provides a brief overview of the challenges the NPS encountered when it assumed responsibility for managing America's cultural sites beginning in the 1930s and how the agency struggled to unify the fields of history, interpretation, and education, specifically in regard to the National Mall and Anacostia Park. This dissertation does not suggest that only historians should be employed as interpreters; instead, it recommends that content experts (including historians, public historians, archaeologists, architects, historic preservationists, anthropologists, education specialists, biologists, etc.) work in tandem to create more engaging and inclusive programming and resources for the public. While not a comprehensive history of the agency or its approach to historical interpretation, this chapter outlines past and current interpretive trends in the National Park Service and explores how associated training is conceptualized, implemented, and practiced in parks. I then discuss how this process influences the histories that are both included and excluded from a unit's interpretation, specifically pertaining to the history of the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign in the National Capital Area parks. Relying on National Park Service publications and interpretive guides, as well as oral history interviews with interpretive rangers and staff,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the following pages also provide a glimpse into how interpretive trends have changed over the last several decades, especially leading up to and directly following the agency's centennial in 2016.

### **The Emergence of Interpretive Pedagogy in the National Park Service**

Today the NPS is a national system composed of over 400 park units including historic sites, monuments, national seashores, national historic trails, and more.<sup>22</sup> By the beginning of the twenty-first century, approximately two-thirds of the units cared for by the NPS “exist[ed] explicitly to protect and interpret cultural and historic resources,” yet the National Park Service originally began as an agency caring for large nature parks and Indigenous cultural sites in the west.<sup>23</sup> The agency grew out of the growing concern for natural conservation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a phenomenon that had roots in the Romantic Movement.<sup>24</sup> Political thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson associated the taming and “cultivation of the wilderness” with “the foundation of democracy and national prosperity.”<sup>25</sup> The traversing and “conquering” of the natural landscape became an American experience, and as historian Lary M. Dilsaver noted, this

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Taking hold in American at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Romantic Movement encouraged exposure to nature as a form of spiritual upliftment. The desire to immerse oneself in nature became popular in America particularly with the opening of the frontier. Unlike the “known” landscapes of Europe, colonizers understood the untouched “wilderness” as something truly American. In his article, “Americans and Their Forests: Romanticism, Progress, and Science in the Late Nineteenth Century,” historian Thomas R. Cox explained that during the Romantic Movement, Americans gained a new appreciation for natural landscapes. Instead of glorifying the natural wonders of Europe, which are steeped in thousands of years of history, there was a growing appreciation for the “raw” landscapes of America. Thomas R. Cox, “Americans and Their Forests: Romanticism, Progress, and Science in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Forest History* 29, No. 4 (Oct., 1985), pp. 156-168, 157.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted from Cox, “Americans and Their Forests,” 156. Denise Meringolo noted that Thomas Jefferson saw a connection between Americans’ natural and cultural resources; one often denoted the other. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*.

“rise in attention to nature coincided with the search for identity and pride among American literati.”<sup>26</sup> Early Americans often romanticized the early colonization of North America, with the concept of “nature” becoming tied to the emerging culture of America, despite the influence of Native Nations on “natural” landscapes. Men like Jefferson believed the environment was at the root of the human experience as “the study of nature and the study of the past were nearly indistinguishable.”<sup>27</sup> The expansiveness and grandeur of the American landscape combined with the cultural remnants of past civilizations (such as Casa Grande, and Mesa Verde) became part of colonizers’ attempts to negotiate “America” as a nation descended from Anglo-Saxon traditions and, in the process, appropriated the heritage of Indigenous tribes.

The allure of “nature” beckoned to many Americans, and businessmen and entrepreneurs built resorts and other tourist attractions in popular destinations such as the Grand Canyon. But the federal government did not take an active role in managing or preserving these landscapes until the late-nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> In fact, before the Civil War, “the two major purposes of public land legislation in the United States were to raise money for the government and to encourage settlement of the frontier.”<sup>29</sup> This began to change when Congress established Yellowstone as a National Park, in 1872. While public lands had been set aside “for public use, resort, and recreation” in previous years, the creation of Yellowstone marked a pivotal turning point in government involvement in

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<sup>26</sup> Lary M. Dilsaver (ed), *America’s National Park System: The Critical Documents* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 7.

<sup>27</sup> Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Cox, “Americans and Their Forests,” 157-9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 160.

managing public lands.<sup>30</sup> As Dilsaver notes, Yellowstone’s establishment indicated “the first serious challenge to the culture of land alienation and consumptive use in American history.”<sup>31</sup> The National Park was protected from encroaching settlement and the railroads, and responsibility for its management and preservation fell to the Secretary of the Interior.<sup>32</sup> In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Congress created several new National Parks and passed legislation protecting Casa Grande, located in Arizona (a significant step in NPS history as the agency began caring for cultural as well as natural sites). But several decades passed before the government created a “meaningful system” for caring for these natural landscapes.<sup>33</sup>

The federal government continued to expand in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries and, according to Meringolo, created “federal regulations, scientific programs, and data-gathering agencies,” that allowed it to take an active part “not simply [in] identifying the nation’s resources, but also [in] managing them.”<sup>34</sup> The 1906 Antiquities Act exemplified the government’s growing interest in preserving the country’s natural and cultural resources. Passed in response to the looting of heritage sites, the Antiquities Act made it illegal to “appropriate, excavate, injure, or destroy any historic or prehistoric ruin or monument, or any object of antiquity” found on land

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<sup>30</sup> Before the creation of the first National Park, Congress set aside a small portion of the Yosemite Valley to be cared for by the state of California. The park was later incorporated as part of the National Park Service. Cited in “An Act Authorizing A Grant to the State of California of the ‘Yo-Semite Valley,’ and of the Land Embracing the ‘Mariposa Big Tree Grove,’” approved June 30, 1864 (13 Stat. 325) in *America’s National Park System*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Barry MacIntosh, *The National Parks: Shaping the System* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1991), 10-11.

<sup>33</sup> “An Act to Establish A National Park Service, and for Other Purposes,” approved Aug 25, 1916 (30 Stat. 535) in *America’s National Park System*, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 27.

“owned or controlled by the Government of the United States.”<sup>35</sup> Violators received only minimal punishment, yet despite its leniency, the act was significant as it indicated that there was a need to regulate public land, and the federal government was ready and willing to intervene to protect America’s cultural resources. The Antiquities Act also established a permitting process requiring professionals to request permission for “the examination of ruins, the excavation of archaeological sites, and the gathering of objects of antiquity...”<sup>36</sup> Such activities would only be approved if “undertaken for the benefit of reputable museums, universities, colleges, or other recognized scientific or educational institutions,” implying that resources on government property should benefit the knowledge of the public.<sup>37</sup> The act was also a tangible example of the government beginning to exercise its power to restrict access to public land for the benefit of the resources and the public.

Important not only for what it protected—archeological sites and artifacts—the Antiquities Act also indicated a shift in the federal government’s policy toward cultural resource management. In the following years, Congress sought a more organized and effective way to manage the natural and cultural lands in its care. In 1916, Congress passed the Organic Act, establishing the National Park Service to manage the growing number of National Parks. Originally functioning as an agency managing public lands in predominantly western portions of the U.S. during its first few decades, the NPS did not have professionally trained historians on staff until the 1930s.<sup>38</sup> Even then, the study of

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<sup>35</sup> *Federal Historic Preservation Laws*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>38</sup> Whisnant, *Imperiled Promise*, 20.

natural resources remained largely separate from that of historical resources.<sup>39</sup> By the 1930s, the agency took on a much larger role in managing cultural sites throughout the county; it was not until Verne Chatelain became the first Chief Historian of the NPS in 1931 that there were intentions for *interpreting* America's cultural properties. Hired by NPS director Horace Albright, Chatelain attempted to define the role historians would play in the agency and developed standards to guide the process of selecting new historic sites for inclusion within the NPS. Chatelain underscored the importance of creating a unified structure for historical interpretation, attempting to unite historic sites to a broader story of the nation's past. In addition to aligning units under a common management style, he also sought to guide parks in creating historical content that was engaging to visitors, "distinguishing between the 'dull recital of meaningless facts' and the 'color' and 'pageantry' of the past."<sup>40</sup> Together, Albright and Chatelain influenced the trajectory of the NPS by allowing themselves to imagine the possibilities of a federal system dedicated not only to preservation, but also to the interpretation of America's most significant natural and cultural resources.

After two years of working together to direct the culture of the NPS, Albright and Chatelain had an opportunity to shift the mission of the NPS radically with the election of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Inaugurated in March of 1933, Roosevelt wasted no time in addressing the worsening crisis of the Great Depression or in implementing public works programs that changed the face of social reform in America. With programs like the Works Progress Administration, which employed cultural resource experts to

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<sup>39</sup> Sprinkle, *Crafting Preservation Criteria*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, 107.

document and preserve American places and histories, Roosevelt encouraged research and preservation in the fields of archaeology, oral story-telling, and architectural history.<sup>41</sup> At the time of Roosevelt's election, the National Park Service cared for a system of predominately western parks, but Albright saw an opportunity to broaden the mission and influence of the National Park Service by appealing to the new president.

That April, Roosevelt, Albright, and several other government officials took a trip to the Shenandoah Valley. Riding in a car with Roosevelt, Albright tactfully "turned the conversation to history and mentioned his desire to acquire the War Department's historical areas."<sup>42</sup> Roosevelt, excited by the prospect, spent most of the ride conversing about "historic events and men" such as "Lee and Stratford, Grant and Appomattox, John D. Rockefeller and Williamsburg, etc." Albright deduced that "President Roosevelt enjoyed himself immensely on the ride."<sup>43</sup> Due in part to his love of history and his interest in Albright's suggestion, "Roosevelt readily agreed," and two months later, the president signed Executive Order 6166.<sup>44</sup> While an important step in the history of the National Park Service and the field of cultural resource management more broadly, the exchange between the two men reveals the inception of a historical framework focused exclusively on the history white men of privilege and notoriety, a trend that would

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<sup>41</sup> Of the several progressive era programs the Roosevelt administration implemented, including the Civilian Conservation Core (CCC) and Public Works Administration (PWA), the Works Progress Administration was best known for hiring professionals in the field of cultural resource management. David Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930's* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> Macintosh, *Shaping the System*, 24.

<sup>43</sup> Horace M. Albright, *Origins of National Park Service Administration of Historic Sites* (Philadelphia: Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1971), accessed October 15, 2019 <http://nps.history.com/publications/origins-albright.pdf>, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Macintosh, *Shaping the System*, 24

continue to dictate the focus of much of the agency's interpretation through the twentieth century.

Executive Order 6166 reorganized the federal executive department, expanding the scope of the NPS's mission. Part of this reorganization entailed the transfer of historic sites and battlefields managed by the War Department to the National Park Service.<sup>45</sup> Former NPS Bureau Historian Barry MacIntosh referred to the reorganization as "arguably the most significant event in the evolution of the National Park System."<sup>46</sup> As a result of the executive order, the NPS was given authority to acquire and preserve cultural resources. Not only did the agency begin to manage new types of properties, such as the parks in the national capital region, including the National Mall and Anacostia Park, the executive order facilitated future opportunities for the NPS to document and interpret places associated with prominent events and people in American history. Many of the sites Albright sought to acquire included those associated with the early colonial conquests, American expansionism, and battlefields of the American Revolution and Civil War, including Yorktown Battlefield and George Washington's birthplace.<sup>47</sup> The majority of sites highlighted the history of white men, ignoring the role women, people of color, immigrants, disabled Americans, sexually variant and gender nonconforming Americans, and others played in the history of the nation.

The acquisition of the War Department's historic properties, while largely Albright's doing, presented the NPS with a number of challenges as it was still unprepared for the level of care, maintenance, and overall research required to manage

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<sup>45</sup> Dilsaver, *America's National Park System* 116.

<sup>46</sup> MacIntosh, *Shaping the System*, 24.

<sup>47</sup> Hosmer, 927-9.

these properties. Recalling his early days at the National Park Service, Chatelain declared that the agency did not have “the foggiest notion of how to handle them.”<sup>48</sup> The National Park Service went from a federal agency without a single professional historian in 1930 to a bureau managing 80 different cultural sites by 1933.<sup>49</sup> While under the care of the War Department, many of the battlefields that later became the property of the NPS lacked any interface with the public. Chatelain recognized the importance of creating a formal interpretive process, yet it would take another two decades to create a department specifically dedicated for interpreting the significance of its cultural resources to the public.<sup>50</sup>

While historical interpretation was not originally part of the National Park Service’s responsibility, early publications and communications by NPS senior officials reveal that it was a subtle yet ever-present part of the agency’s goals. In June 1933, the same month Roosevelt signed Executive Order 6166, Horace Albright wrote about the importance of research in National Parks. The NPS Director referred to parks and historic sites as “magnificent laboratories” for research and education.<sup>51</sup> While the federal agency was preoccupied with the preservation of its sites in the years after its founding, it had, by the 1930s, reoriented its focus to learn more about its public lands through “ecology, geology, and archaeology.”<sup>52</sup> Albright articulated that research was needed to answer visitors’ questions about natural and cultural features. He even revealed that “the guided

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<sup>48</sup> Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., “Verne E. Chatelain and the Development of the Branch of History of the National Park Service,” *The Public Historian* 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1994): 24-38, 29.

<sup>49</sup> Sprinkle, *Crafting Preservation Criteria*, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Whisnant, *Imperiled Promise*, 20-22.

<sup>51</sup> Dilsaver, *America's National Park System*, 122.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 131.

field trips and popularly worded lectures of today, as well as the museum service, grew out of this demand of the visitors to know the ‘why’ of interesting phenomenon...”<sup>53</sup>

Albright’s words are significant as they denote the importance of visitor interest in shaping the foundations of NPS interpretation. It was the public’s curiosity that drove the creation of interpretative programming, a factor that continues to direct interpretive pedagogy in the present.

Chatelain also created new opportunities for the NPS when he envisioned parks as “classrooms: places for teaching history.”<sup>54</sup> According to public history scholar Denise Meringolo, what Albright and Chatelain were achieving within the NPS was not only a broadening of the agency’s mission; they were shaping a new discipline, “inform[ing] the cultural milieu of something we now call public history.”<sup>55</sup> By marrying history and public interpretation, Albright and Chatelain ushered in a new age focused on visitor engagement. But while the NPS was involved in interpretation from the beginning due to visitor interest, it did not have an actual department dedicated to interpretation until the 1950s.

In 1954, the NPS created the Division of Interpretation, led by the Chief Historian Ronald F. Lee, which combined historic research with public education.<sup>56</sup> Around this time, the National Park Service received a grant from an anonymous donor (later identified as Old Dominion Foundation), to fund a study of NPS interpretation.<sup>57</sup> National

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 124.

<sup>54</sup> Whisnant, *Imperiled Promise*, 20.

<sup>55</sup> Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks*, xxix.

<sup>56</sup> Whisnant, *Imperiled Promise*, 21-22.

<sup>57</sup> In the second edition of Tilden’s *Interpreting Our Heritage*, published in 1967, the then NPS director George B. Hartzog, Jr. identified the charitable organization that provided the grant to fund Tilden’s work. Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977).

Park Service Director Conrad L. Wirth chose author and avid naturalist Freeman Tilden to initiate “a survey and re-appraisal of the basic principles and methods used in the interpretation-education program carried on throughout the National Park System.”<sup>58</sup> The survey resulted in the publication of *Interpreting Our Heritage* in 1957. Tilden’s influential book is significant for several reasons; most notably, he defines interpretation which, at that point, was an emerging discipline. He also established six guiding principles to adhere to when engaging the public, including communicating the relevance of the site, offering content that is inspirational (not just educational), and presenting a broader picture of the content material (instead of a summary of its parts). The author explained that the art of interpretation entailed more than imparting information; to be successful, it needed to inspire revelation and insight provocation.<sup>59</sup>

Tilden’s guiding principles remain relevant to the field today and are referenced by modern NPS interpreters as the foundations of contemporary interpretive training.<sup>60</sup> His work was rooted in a larger National Park Service initiative to reassess its interpretive practices. The book was a timely resource as the NPS was struggling with how to effectively steward both natural and cultural resources in its care. Part of a larger movement within the agency to integrate historical research and public education, *Interpreting Our Heritage* identified best practices in the field. The book’s publication marked an important moment in establishing an interpretive pedagogy in the National

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted from “Study to be Made of Park Service Interpretation,” *History News* 10, No. 9 (July, 1955), pp. 33-34; In the Forward to the Second Edition, Director of the National Park Service, George B. Hartzog, Jr., detailed how funding was procured for the publication of the book. Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, xiv.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> A number of the NPS personnel interviewed referenced the importance of Tilden’s work. They cite his principles as being at the heart of what they are trying to achieve with their interpretation, including striving for relevance with diverse audiences.

Park Service, yet over the next several decades new preservation legislation caused the fields of history and interpretation to diverge into separate disciplines within the agency.

### **Preparing for a Second Century: The National Park Service Centennial and Beyond**

The divide between the disciplines of history (the process of acquiring historical knowledge through primary research) and interpretation (the practical application of historical knowledge in parks through exhibits and ranger-led programs) is one that has impacted the quality of historical material provided at park units nationwide. While the disconnect between cultural resource management experts (historians, archaeologists, preservationists, architectural historians, etc.) and resource interpretation posed challenges within the agency, it was also problematic for the field of interpretation more broadly as the NPS was one of the leading public entities informing the trajectory of the field. In 1986, Barry Mackintosh published *Interpretation in the National Park Service: A Historical Perspective* in which he claimed that the field was in crisis as “there [was] a shortage of good interpreters, well grounded in their parks’ subject matter.” Citing a survey conducted in parks in the Pacific Northwest in the 1970s, Mackintosh revealed that field interpreters possessed “poor communications skills, poor morale, lack of employee understanding of Service goals, insufficient training, recruitment and rehire of seasonals, and inexperienced supervisors.”<sup>61</sup>

By the 1990s, practitioners recognized the need to reorient the discipline. Over the next three decades, various offices and personnel, both trained interpreters and cultural

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<sup>61</sup> Mackintosh, *Interpretation in the National Park Service*, [https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/mackintosh2/interp\\_in\\_crisis.htm](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/mackintosh2/interp_in_crisis.htm).

resource content experts, issued reports, resources, and training guides to help practitioners continuously refine interpretive practice. While this outpouring reflects the National Park Service's effort to shift the trajectory of the field, the sheer amount of resources, while helpful to many field interpreters, is also overwhelming and in some ways muddles the broader goals of the agency. These resources are also a reflection of different offices within the NPS pursuing their own definitions of and directions in the field of interpretation. While many staff are conscientious of creating interpretation that supports and builds on the work of other personnel, the NPS is also known for its siloed nature, and collaboration is not an inherent part of agency culture. Nevertheless, these documents (examined in context to the oral histories conducted by the author) help piece together a broader picture of the interpretive trends within the NPS; in the last three decades, the agency has shifted from claiming exclusive authority on its interpretive content to partnering with visitors to share in the process of co-creation of historical narratives. While much still needs to be done to fully recognize the diverse voices that contribute to the history of the United States, the National Park Service is gradually incorporating the tenets of shared authority and inclusivity into official interpretation.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> In the context of recording oral histories, Michael Frisch explores the importance of inviting the public to act as co-participants in the historical process. Noting the "tension between oral history as a course of change and oral tradition as a source of resistance to change," he articulates the need for what he calls "shared authority," the practice of including members of the public in the interpretation of the past. Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York, 1990), 2. Other practitioners in related disciplines have echoed similar calls including Stephen Weil, former deputy director of the Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. While he does not explicitly use the term "shared authority," his book *Making Museums Matter* implies that successful public engagement entails stakeholder collaboration. Much of his work revolves around the question of how to make museums relevant to the ever-changing public, a line of inquiry modern practitioners continue to explore. Stephen Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2002).

In the last several decades, staff at all levels of the agency have provided critical feedback as part of a larger conversation about relevancy and diversity, including field interpreters across the country, personnel in the Washington Office of Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers (IE&V) at the agency’s headquarters in Washington, D.C., and members of the Interpretive Development Program at the Stephen T. Mather Training Center in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. While interpretive rangers in parks (overseen by a Chief of Interpretation) often have a level of freedom to interpret the stories of their park, they receive support from IE&V and the Interpretive Development Program. The Washington Office of Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers oversees initiatives relating to interpretation and education more broadly across the country and “develop[s] necessary standards and procedures.”<sup>63</sup> The office and its staff serve as the “trusted educational leader for the nation, . . . providing opportunities for stewardship and action.”<sup>64</sup> Staff in this office do not engage directly with visitors; instead, they “create the policies, strategies, processes, initiatives, and funding that then helps support the parks to help support the visitors.”<sup>65</sup> In contrast, the Interpretive Development Program at Mather Training Center functions as the “training arm for the entire Park Service,” providing in-person trainings, webinars, online courses, resource guides, and other tools.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Fran P. Mainella, “Director’s Orders #6: Interpretation and Education,” National Park Service, (January 19, 2005), accessed October 10, 2019, <http://www.nps.gov/policy/DOrders/DOrder6.html>.

<sup>64</sup> “Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers,” InsideNPS website, accessed October 10, 2019 (only accessible to NPS personnel).

<sup>65</sup> Kerry Olson, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey (Washington Service Office, Washington, DC: July 11, 2019).

<sup>66</sup> John Rudy, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey (Mather Training Center, Harper’s Ferry, WV: May 24, 2019).

Cooperation between practitioners at all levels was crucial in shifting interpretive culture within the NPS and has led to new trends in interpretive practices.

Until the late twentieth century, interpretive rangers in the field (those creating and delivering interpretation at parks across the country) were assumed to be content experts who were expected to deliver monologue-style programming about the history affiliated with their park. But as noted in Mackintosh's *Interpretation in the National Park Service*, a number of interpreters lacked the historical research skills and training needed to do the work effectively. There was a desire among cultural resource experts and interpreters to forge new methodologies for the delivery of historical content with an emphasis on audience participation, inspired largely by contemporary public history practice. The best example of this can be seen in David L. Larsen's leadership of the Interpretive Development Program at the Mather Training Center. Trained as a historian, Larsen was exposed to new lines of inquiry in the field of public history and its emphasis on engagement through conversation, an element he incorporated into the National Park Service's interpretive training programs. Influenced by his association with prominent public-oriented historian David Thelen, Larsen became interested in using dialogue as a way to connect with ordinary Americans about the past.<sup>67</sup>

One of Larsen's most influential contributions to the field of interpretation was an interactive workbook *Meaningful Interpretation: How to Connect Hearts and Minds to Places, Objects, and Other Resources*. Working with fellow staff at the Mather Training Center, Larsen collaborated with a number of interpretive rangers and specialists to

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<sup>67</sup> John Rudy, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey; Ruth J. Abraham, "Kitchen Conversations: Democracy in Action at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum." *The Public Historian*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2007, pp. 59–76.

produce the training tool. An innovative resource that changed the way interpreters approached the practice, the book was the product of cross-collaboration between historians and interpreters. Deemed by one reviewer to fill “an essential need in the ongoing professionalization of interpretation,” *Meaningful Interpretation* stressed the act of reflection as a key part of the interpretive process.<sup>68</sup> The book was designed to be interactive, and it prompted practitioners to consider the lesser-known meanings of their park, the interests of their audiences, and even their own biases. The call for practitioners to evaluate their successes and limitations in the field was a defining moment in NPS practice that laid a foundation for future interpretive training.

Using examples, reflective questions, and instructional videos, *Meaningful Interpretation* served as a resource for field interpreters seeking to delve more deeply into the history of their park. Building on the foundations espoused by Freeman Tilden and his call for relevance and revelation, the interactive guide was “meant to inspire and help [interpreters] explore the notion that all interpretation facilitates a connection between visitors and the meanings found in the places they visit.”<sup>69</sup> It also touched on Tilden’s claim that interpretation was not the recitation of fact, suggesting that it should instead be a dialogue between the interpreter and visitors. This interpretive resource emphasized the importance of acknowledging multiple points of view on past events, instructing interpreters to give visitors space “to express and maintain their own perspectives.”<sup>70</sup> Instead of a monologue about historical details of the park, rangers were advised to allow

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<sup>68</sup> Theresa G. Coble, “Book Review: *Meaningful Interpretation*,” *Journal of Interpretation Research* 9, no.1 (2004): <https://www.interpnet.com/docs/JIR-v9n1.pdf>, 47.

<sup>69</sup> David Larsen (ed.), *Meaningful Interpretation: How to Connect Hearts and Minds to Places, Objects, and Other Resources*, (Eastern National, 2003), 45.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

the visitors to find meaning for themselves as “interpreters do not determine the truth for any audience, but [instead] help all audiences care about the resource.”<sup>71</sup>

Larsen’s attempts to incorporate dialogue as a key tenet of interpretation changed the trajectory of the field. According to John Rudy, an interpretive trainer in the Interpretive Development Program (and Larsen’s former colleague), Larsen’s leadership led to the idea of creating interpretation based on the “concept of intellectual, emotional connections, helping visitors to care about the place, and then care for it, functionally.”<sup>72</sup> The emphasis on dialogue, already a topic of study in public history circles, became the backbone twenty-first century interpretive pedagogy in the National Park Service. It served as the conception for later methodologies including the Facilitated Dialogue and Audience Centered Interpretation (ACE) models (discussed later in this chapter).

The reevaluation of the state of interpretation in the NPS coincided with efforts to broaden the scope of historical and cultural resources and themes. In 2000, Congress passed the National Park System New Area Study Act requiring the Secretary of the Interior to consider “themes, sites and resources not already adequately represented in the National Park System,” for inclusion.<sup>73</sup> Officials at the highest levels of the agency were encouraged to identify underrepresented communities not included within the histories interpreted at existing NPS units. The act was intended to prompt more inclusive representations of all Americans through the addition of more diverse park units, by commissioning National Historic Landmark theme studies, and by broadening criteria for

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>72</sup> John Rudy, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

<sup>73</sup> “National Park System New Area Study Act of 2000,” Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, (October, 1999), 48.

eligibility on the National Register of Historic Places. While directed towards cultural resource practitioners, this call for greater visibility of marginalized stories impacted interpretation within parks, prompting rangers to explore the untold stories within their units.

In response to the New Area Study Act of 2000, programs within the NPS sought to establish a more multivocal narrative by creating tools for professionals and the public, including “Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites” (created in 2002 and revised in 2008). A result of a partnership between the NPS National Historic Landmarks program and the Organization of American Historians, the document established guidelines to help identify sites associated with the Civil Rights Movement. One of the many resources that proliferated after the passage of the New Area of Study Act, the Civil Rights Framework provided a historical overview of civil rights struggles in America and identified significant people and places that should be incorporated into NPS interpretation. With the content already provided, the process of nominating potential historic sites for inclusion within the NPS became an easier process.<sup>74</sup>

Around the time the National Park Service was attempting to broaden its interpretation of the past, traditional historians and public historians were also struggling with how to achieve relevancy in the field and address the history of traditionally

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<sup>74</sup> The civil rights framework led to the inclusion of more park units associated with civil rights in the following years, including the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument and Freedom Riders National Monument, both in Alabama “Interpretation and Education,” *Management Policies 2006* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2006), 90. It should be noted that President Barack Obama was instrumental in the diversification of NPS sites. During his presidency, he used his authority under the Antiquities Act to designate a number of National Monuments, including the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park (Church Creek, MD, 2013), Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument (Washington, D.C., 2016), and Stonewall National Monument (New York City, 2016).

marginalized communities. Through research conducted by Roy Rosenweig and David Thelen, historians and public historians began realizing that members of the public, while actively engaged in learning about the past in some way (through genealogy research, visits to historic sites, talking with elders, etc.), outwardly expressed disdain for more formal historical learning as presented in the classroom. The two historians recognized that Americans were largely learning about the past through public history methods that were once dismissed by traditional historians.<sup>75</sup> This realization created an opportunity for National Parks and Historic Sites to use their units as platforms to connect visitors to the past.

The push for more inclusivity continued into the early twenty-first century as the NPS geared up to celebrate its centennial in 2016. The preparation for the agency-wide commemoration also coincided with the release of an updated version of the “Management Policies” for the NPS in 2006. The document, the “basic Service-wide policy document of the National Park Service,” contained a list of laws, executive orders, and general guidelines that all parks and personnel service-wide were required to follow.<sup>76</sup> In addition to providing guidelines on natural and cultural resource management, the document also touched on the role interpretation played in visitor experiences, reaffirming that the “purpose of NPS interpretive and educational programs is to advance [the NPS] mission by providing memorable educational and recreational experiences that will (1) help the public understand the meaning and relevance of park resources, and (2) foster development of a sense of stewardship.”

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<sup>75</sup> Roy Rosenweig, and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>76</sup> “Introduction,” *Management Policies 2006*, (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2006), 2.

All parks were instructed to “develop an interpretive and educational program that [was] grounded in (1) park resources, (2) themes (3) park and Service-wide mission goals.”<sup>77</sup> As defined by the policies, interpretation could take many forms – personal services (tours, talks, campfire programs, etc.), nonpersonal services (wayside markers, park brochures, digital programs, etc.), and curriculum-based programs. While important for articulating the need for shared authority and interdisciplinary collaboration between professionals, the updated management policies failed to fully acknowledge the critical role informed research (and specifically historical scholarship) played in creating effective and moving interpretation. Ideal in theory, the document offered no discussion about the use of primary documents in supporting interpretive programming, underscoring the disconnect between interpretive theory and practical application. The management policies detailed the form and function of various types of interpretation, yet the only attention scholarship received was a brief paragraph advising personnel to establish a “dialogue” with various content experts. The document requires NPS staff to produce “interpretive services of the highest quality,” yet it does not address the tools and methods needed/required to train and prepare front line interpreters.

The policy document required interpreters to create interpretive and educational programs using current research from the field. It specifically stated that “a dialogue must be established and maintained among interpreters, education specialists, resource managers, scientists, archeologists, sociologists, ethnographers, historians, and other experts for the purpose of offering the most current and accurate programs to the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 93.

public.”<sup>78</sup> Cross-disciplinary collaboration was a stated priority for the NPS, and the report recognized that interpretation was most accurate and effective when cultural resource experts worked together and consulted with stakeholder communities.

The updated “Management Policies” were important in setting precedents for the next several decades; they established the vision for what the National Park Service could achieve without fully providing the support and detail necessary to implement these policies in the field. While containing guidelines for the agency more broadly, these policies also pertained specifically to interpretation and established the expectation that “interpretation will encourage dialogue” and involve input from “park neighbors, segments of the population that do not visit national parks, and community decision-makers to stimulate discussion about the park and its meaning in local, regional, and national context.”<sup>79</sup> In addition to recognizing the need for NPS interpretation to engage visitors and communities, these policies also required NPS officials to “provide opportunities for diverse audiences to enjoy and connect to parks” in a way that presented “factual and balanced presentations of the many American cultural, heritages, and histories.”<sup>80</sup> This language gave park personnel permission to seek out and include more diverse stories in their interpretation. Incorporating histories of underrepresented communities was often done on a park by park basis, and the inclusion of guidelines to interpret understudied aspects of American history gave NPS staff the legal and administrative support needed to make an inclusive approach to the past a core tenant in the interpretation created service-wide.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 94.

### **Current NPS Interpretive Practice**

The release of the “Management Policies” in 2006 complemented trends in the field of interpretation which was innovating new ways engage visitor populations. That year, the NPS Education Council released the *Interpretation and Education Renaissance Action Plan*, a report assessing the state of the field. Calling for units to reinvigorate their interpretive strategies in preparation of the impending centennial, the report recognized that “minority groups represent[ed] an ever-growing place in the population . . . [yet] park visitation and park staff [did] not reflect the face of America.” The plan made recommendations for moving forward by “equip[ing] interpreters and educators with the knowledge, skills, and approaches necessary for community and civic engagement for the whole of America” specifically in regard to “ethnic, socioeconomic, and disabled groups that have, for a variety of reasons, not been well connected to national parks in the past.”<sup>81</sup> Other key strategies suggested in the report included staying relevant by having enough staff to interface with the public as well as engaging with audiences using twenty-first century technology. The NPS Education Council’s action plan brought national attention to the need to devote more study to the history of marginalized Americans and engage audiences in these stories. It also granted interpreters the freedom to reassess the state of the field and produce the tools necessary to fulfil the agency’s mission.

Leaders in the field continued to emphasize the importance of making parks meaningful and relevant in the following years through a succession of reports, the most notable being “Achieving Relevance in Our Second Century.” A five-year interpretive

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<sup>81</sup> *Interpretation and Education Renaissance Action Plan*, NPS Education Council, (Fall 2006), 6.

strategy created by the office of Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers (IE&V) in 2014, the report was meant to guide the NPS in its second century of stewardship and help personnel identify “what to do more of, what to do less of, and what to do different.”<sup>82</sup> “Achieving Relevance” was produced out of “listening sessions” organized by IE&V in which NPS representatives met with “stakeholders and partners” as well as the National Park System Advisory Board and the National Leadership Council. These sessions were intended to establish new priorities in the field of interpretation and education that would guide the trajectory of the discipline and set the tone for the NPS in the coming decades. The report built on the NPS Education Council’s 2006 action plan and called for superintendents and program managers to collaborate with other disciplines, parks, and members of the public to keep NPS relevant and accessible to future generations.

“Achieving Relevance in Our Second Century” was intended to function as the “bridge between the vision [for the centennial] and the actions.” While part of the preparation of the centennial, the document was also a way to “identify more effective ways of fulfilling [the] agency’s mission and adapting to [the] changed circumstances,” referring to the lasting effects of the recession and resulting budget cuts.<sup>83</sup> The 2014 plan continued the call for more inclusive interpretation on minority histories, emphasizing the importance of connecting historical themes across parks and encouraging collaboration among practitioners. It identified tangible ways for staff at all levels of the NPS to “place meaningful stories, integrated natural and social systems, and pivotal issues in their

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<sup>82</sup> “Achieving Relevance in Our Second Century,” National Council for Interpretation, Volunteers, and Education, National Park Service, (April 2014), 3.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 1.

greater contexts,” allowing visitors to make connections to broader trends in American history.<sup>84</sup>

IE&V’s efforts to shift the trajectory of the field from the top down was one avenue of pursuing multivocality in park interpretation. The Interpretive Development Program at the Mather Training Center also supported the objectives espoused in “Achieving Relevance” and produced a similar framework, “Foundations of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Interpretation,” a resource updated several times over the course of the past decade. This handbook recognized that interpretive practice was continuously evolving, and it encouraged all interpreters within the National Park Service to adopt an audience-centered approach. Similar to “Achieving Relevance,” the Interpretive Development Program’s “Foundations of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Interpretation,” advocated for greater public engagement by sharing interpretive authority. This approach built on previous interpretive practice and encouraged self-reflection and relationship building to establish trust and comradery with visitors that allowed for a deeper level of revelation.

Two notable contemporary interpretive strategies emerged from resources such as the *Interpretation and Education Renaissance Action Plan*, “Achieving Relevance in Our Second Century,” and “Foundations of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Interpretation”: the Facilitated Dialogue model (and its use of the Arc of Dialogue) and eventually Audience Centered Engagement experiences. Facilitated Dialogue, introduced to the field in the years before the centennial, placed conversation with visitors at the heart of interpretation. While NPS leadership had encouraged a dialogic approach when interpreting the past, the Facilitated

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 7.

Dialogue model identified a specific framework for putting this into action. Instead of asking interpreters to memorize and regurgitate a historical script, this model recognized that “a critical skill to the agency’s success in engaging employees, stakeholders, and communities [was] dialogue.” Once the authority figure with the knowledge, interpreters became mediators who “help[ed] parties overcome communication barriers and engage in productive conversation regarding an issue of mutual concern.”<sup>85</sup>

The interdisciplinary training materials that proliferated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century fostered innovation and a willingness among practitioners to adopt this model when it was first introduced. While it placed greater importance on engagement, the research aspect became an implicit aspect of interpretation. As a result, there is a less obvious emphasis on scholarly research, yet the dialogic form of interpretation is still intended to be based in sound scholarship. Many of the training guides on facilitated dialogues do not explicitly say to consult primary sources and other scholarly material to support interpretive programming, yet there is assumption that interpreters have the knowledge to respond to visitors’ spontaneous questions.

Different from more traditional forms of interpretation, Facilitated Dialogue invites visitors to act as co-participants in the interpretive process. This model also demanded a deeper level of commitment from field rangers who had to do more than recite a monologue about their site; to lead a successful dialogue, interpreters had to listen, engage, and be vulnerable to visitor comments. This model offered a framework composed of an introduction, the Arc of Dialogue, and a conclusion. Facilitated Dialogue

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<sup>85</sup> “Facilitated Dialogue,” Allies for Inclusion, National Park Service, n.d., accessed October 10, 2019, [https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/upload/About-Allies-for-Inclusion-Dialogues\\_2015.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/upload/About-Allies-for-Inclusion-Dialogues_2015.pdf).

training instructed interpreters to welcome audiences and establish a topic for conversation. Then, using the Arc of Dialogue, they were advised to build trust with visitors, a key element in achieving success.

The Arc of Dialogue is a “scaffolding strategy” adapted from the International Coalition Sites of Conscience and the Tenement Museum intended to guide interpreters in facilitating meaningful conversations. Each of the four steps in the arc prompts interpreters to ask audiences a series of questions. “Phase 1: Building Community” encourages facilitators to ask “non-threatening questions” that allow participants to feel comfortable. “Phase 2: Sharing Personal Experience” requires audiences to reflect on and share personal anecdotes related to the topic materials. In the third phase, “Explore Beyond Ourselves,” participants reflect on the topic beyond their own personal experiences, encouraging them to consider perspectives that deviate from their own. Interpreters are instructed to push audiences slightly out of their comfort zone at this point in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of the topic. The final phase (“Synthesis, Impact, and Closure”) is intended to help visitors digest everything they learned and experienced.<sup>86</sup>

While the Facilitated Dialogue approach to interpretation allows field rangers opportunities to connect with audiences, its overall framework lacks attention to scholarly research and is rigidly conceptualized. According to Rudy, interpreters were trained to follow prescribe structure for the conversation that left little room for deviation. The

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<sup>86</sup> “The Arc of Dialogue,” National Park Service Interpretive Development Program, (March, 2014), Common Learning Portal website, accessed October 5, 2019, <http://www.mylearning.nps.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/IFT-Arc-of-Dialogue-HO.pdf> ; “The Arc of Dialogue – Sites of Conscience,” National Park Service Interpretive Development Program, Common Learning Portal website, accessed October 09, 2019, <http://www.mylearning.nps.gov/library-resources/arc-of-dialogue-strategy/>

Interpretive Development Program soon realized they had “created another problem.” After assessing the shortcomings of this model, interpretive trainers adapted the Facilitated Dialogue framework to a newer approach: Audience Centered Engagement (ACE), a very recent methodological practice in the National Park Service introduced at a 2018 training session in the Midwest Regional headquarters in Omaha, Nebraska. That March, interpreters, historians, archaeologists, and cultural resource managers gathered to learn about new approaches to interpretive that have the power to enhance the visitor experience.<sup>87</sup>

Referred to as Audience Centered Engagement, this format is not necessarily new, yet it requires a serious commitment from park interpreters. Park rangers have been trained to engage visitors in facilitated dialogues – conversations led by the interpreter with audience participation and feedback. The dialogue approach encourages visitors to share their thoughts and participate in meaningful conversations, however the method lacks a deeper educational component. The audience-centered approach builds on the skills interpreters developed in the facilitated dialogue approach and pushes them to create simple, cost-effective, yet powerful programs that encourage visitors to think about their own personal experiences. Unlike the earlier Facilitated Dialogue models, ACE programs also place more emphasis on research and stress the importance of using current scholarship to connect with visitors. This form of interpretation also relays historical knowledge and prompts the audience to relate to people of the past in a way that creates empathy and compassion. It also encourages visitors to express different

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<sup>87</sup> John Rudy, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

opinions in ways that are not oppositional—visitors can acknowledge that there are multiple answers to a question.

Similar to Facilitated Dialogue, ACE provides a more in-depth dialogic framework. According the Rudy, “Audience Centered Experience is the big umbrella, and facilitated dialogue is one way to accomplish that, and there are many different ways to accomplish it.”<sup>88</sup> Other offices within the agency also acknowledge the Facilitated Dialogue model as a tool within the broader framework of audience engagement. The NPS Archeology Program, for example, which also provides interpretive training, recognizes that “audience-centered interpretation is facilitated dialogue, in which interpreters elicit ideas and information from the audience for shared and collective learning.”<sup>89</sup> While the Facilitated Dialogue model was introduced to the field several years earlier, the Audience Centered Engagement model has come to include those forms of interpretation that make connections and conversations with visitors. The members of the Interpretive Development Program conceptualized this idea through innovation and by drawing on other resources such as the Arc of Dialogue and understand it not only as an interpretive model, but as a motto. Rudy explained that the Interpretive Development Program has over the past year “been honing down on tiny ways to accomplish [Audience Centered Engagement] instead of huge ways.”<sup>90</sup> Their workbook “Forging Connections Through Audience Centered Experience,” released in spring 2019, is one attempt to achieve this. This resource is a follow-up to the Interpretive Development

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<sup>88</sup> John Rudy, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

<sup>89</sup> “Interpretation for Archeologists,” Archeology Program, National Park Service, (October 2019), accessed October 10, 2019, [http://www.nps.gov/archeology/IforA/tools\\_8.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archeology/IforA/tools_8.htm)

<sup>90</sup> John Rudy, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

Program's not so successful foray into dialogic interpretation in that it recognizes that "interpretation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is resource-based and audience-centered."<sup>91</sup> The workbook attempts to "instill an ethic" in interpreters to appreciate what audiences have to say.<sup>92</sup>

ACE specifically is "an ethic and practice" that does not necessarily talk about the natural scenery or the history of the site.<sup>93</sup> Rudy insists that ACE is public history in practice as it should entail "talking about [visitors'] lives and how the lessons they learn in the park can be applied to them."<sup>94</sup> The ACE handbook guides interpreters on how to ask the right questions at the opportune time, and helps them identify the type of program best ideal for them and their park by working collaboratively, creating prototypes, and giving verbal and team-building techniques. Audience Center Engagement experiences can take the form of pop-up exhibits, ranger-led tours, or even a simple one-on-one exchange between an interpreter and visitor. The key in each scenario is to anticipate when to ask questions that will first build trust, challenge the visitor to reflect, and prompt them to share and be vulnerable with the group.

ACE uses dialogic questions from the Arc of Dialogue that requires interpreters to first make audiences comfortable with low-risk questions. Interpreters then ask a series of questions that prompts visitors to think more deeply by reflecting on personal experiences and considering other perspectives. The Audience Centered Engagement approach hinges on an interpreter's ability to ask the right questions at the opportune moment. For

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<sup>91</sup> "Forging Connections Through Audience Centered Experience."

<sup>92</sup> John Rudy, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

<sup>93</sup> "Forging Connections Through Audience Centered Experience."

<sup>94</sup> John Rudy, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

example, asking participants trust-building questions at the beginning of a program is crucial in establishing the rapport needed to ask more challenging questions later on. Older models of interpretation, especially within the NPS, were intended to convince visitors that the park and its resources were important with the goal of prompting them to care for and preserve that place. While current NPS interpretation still attempts to make connections between the resources and the public, interpreters now try to get visitors to consider viewpoints that differ from their own. The practice of interpretation is no longer about the visitor listening to and having to take away what the interpreter wants; visitors have a new level of power to craft their own experiences, express thoughts, and play a role in deciding the meaning of a park.

Within this more recent and impassioned conversation about relevancy and audience-engagement, the focus on inclusivity fell from the forefront of interpretive rhetoric, yet it still remained an important goal in many parks. With federal agencies seeking to align with the objectives of each new presidential administration, National Park Service rhetoric (pertaining to interpretation as well as agency goals more broadly) shifted with the incoming administration in 2016. While many parks and programs still pursue multivocality in historical content and interpretation, it has become a less apparent part of training material. Other offices outside of the formal interpretation directorate continue to promote the inclusion of many voices in NPS content, including the Office of Relevancy, Diversity and Inclusion which serves as a “champion for an organization culture that is increasingly inclusive and participatory, which values the diverse ideas, experiences and background of every individual, and empowers and innovative, flexible,

and resilient NPS to engage the opportunities and challenges of the future.”<sup>95</sup> As the office responsible for overseeing the “strategies for the engagement of diverse communities and organizations, [and] the expansion of inclusive interpretation,” ORDI works with the IE&V to provide resources to park interpreters, including tools such as the “Removal of Confederate Flag from National Park Sites” (2015), “Confederate Monuments & Memorials” (2017), and “400 Years: Discussion Slavery, Freedom & Race in America” (2019) discussion guides.<sup>96</sup>

The Office of Relevancy, Diversity and Inclusion also oversees and supports the employee resources groups (ERGs). The National Park Service has employee resource groups for Disabled, Hispanic, Indigenous, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) employees and more. In addition to providing support, these employee-led groups “work towards advancing relevancy, diversity, and inclusion throughout the organization.”<sup>97</sup> ERGs play an important part not only in advocating content and interpretation of all Americans, they also help forge a more inclusive culture within the agency.

Another office that continues to lead efforts for inclusivity is the Cultural Resources Office of Interpretation and Education (CROIE). Led by Program Manager Dr. Barbara J. Little, CROIE “works across boundaries to celebrate our rich, complex, and

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<sup>95</sup> “Homepage,” Office of Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion, National Park Service, accessed October 10, 2019, <http://www.nps.gov/orgs/1244/index.htm>

<sup>96</sup> “Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion,” InsideNPS website, accessed October 10, 2019, (accessible only by NPS personnel).

<sup>97</sup> “Employee Resource Groups,” Common Learning Portal, National Park Service, accessed October 14, 2019, <https://mylearning.nps.gov/library-resources/employee-resource-groups-2/>

intertwined histories.”<sup>98</sup> With its website, “Telling All Americans’ Stories,” CROIE leads in creating interpretation that bridges natural and cultural resource topics and produces interpretive tools that emphasize multiple historical perspectives. Over the past several years, Little has worked with other NPS professionals to innovate a new type of interpretive resource that offers opportunities to consider the meaning of a place, to reveal excluded stories, and to facilitate healing and change. Titled the “Discovery Journal” the interactive workbook focuses on inquiry-based and audience-centered interpretation, yet it goes further than other training material in that one of its main objectives is to engage audiences in transformative healing. Exploring place and its connections to universal concepts and themes is at the heart of the workbook, and it encourages interpreters to work within a team to create transformational place-based interpretation. By prompting users with a series of place-specific questions, the “Discovery Journal” prompts users to consider untold or underrepresented stories of their place and leads them through the process of doing research and creating interpretation that addresses this marginalization.<sup>99</sup>

In the last several years, CROIE has facilitated the creation of the theme studies such as *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History* (edited by Megan E. Springate) In 2016, CROIE worked with leading

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<sup>98</sup> Cultural Resources Office for Interpretation and Education,” National Park Service, Accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1023/index.htm>.

<sup>99</sup> Katherine Crawford-Lackey and Barbara J. Little, “Exploring American Places with the Discovery Journal: A Guide to Co-Creating Meaningful Interpretation.” *The George Wright Forum* 34 no. 4, (2017): 335-342; Katherine Crawford-Lackey and Barbara J. Little, “Where the Water Takes You: Unlocking Place-Based Meanings Through Inquiry at the Tidal Basin in Washington DC.” *Open Rivers* 7 (2017): 40-57. For more information about the Discovery Journal, see “Telling all Americans’ Stories.” National Park Service. Accessed October 22, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/index.htm>.

scholars in the field to produce the LGBTQ theme study, a document that resulted from efforts leading up to the NPS's centennial to "tell the stories about the struggle for freedom, justice and equality for our country's most underrepresented population, including women, African-America, Latino American, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Native Alaskans and Hawaiians."<sup>100</sup> Over the past year, CROIE has also been one of the key offices leading the National Park Service's commemoration of the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment. With CROIE's Interpretive Coordinator, Megan E. Springate also serving as the National Coordinator of the NPS Nineteenth Amendment Centennial Commemoration, the office researched, wrote, and posted most of the women's history and women's suffrage content found on NPS.gov. Working as an independent contractor through a cooperative agreement between the National Council on State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) and the National Park Service, I also worked with the Cultural Resources Office of Interpretation and Education to design and create the "Women's History" and "Travel Where Women Made History" websites that serve as the prime digital outlets for historical content and interpretation relating to women's history and suffrage service wide.

CROIE's achievements are an important part of the institutional history of interpretation within the NPS, demonstrating that there are programs outside of the formal interpretation directorate that are actively engaged in this work. Their work also underscores the power of digital resources in informing the trajectory of the field. While park interpretation is key as rangers are the face of NPS through their in-person

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<sup>100</sup> "LGBTQ Theme Study Fact Sheet," National Park Service, (October, 2016), accessed October 10, 2019, <http://www.nps.gov/subjects.lgbtqheritage/upload/lgbtq-factsheet.pdf>.

interactions with visitors, digital interpretation via websites, educational programs, and online training are becoming an integral part of interpretive practice.

### **Creating Inclusivity with Audience Engagement: Oral Testimonies from NPS Interpreters**

Over the past several decades, there have been top-down efforts to implement more inclusive, audience centered interpretation, yet individual park units and interpreters have adopted these tools and methods sporadically. Some parks were ahead of the curve in creating interpretation that included more diverse voices and addressed histories of conflict. Other parks remain rooted in traditional interpretation due to a number of reasons, including staff and funding shortages as well as an unwillingness to engage with NPS leadership. There are also a number of interpreters who were trained to in the monograph style of delivery who remain dedicated to this approach. Interpretive trainer John Rudy recognizes that the current interpretive method of Audience Centered Engagement hasn't "gotten into a lot of different places, because of how different it is," yet audience centered dialogue is an ideal vehicle to continue the agency's mission to recognize the stories of all Americans. Using thoughtfully crafted questions, this dialogic technique makes history approachable by asking visitors about their personal experiences—moments when they have felt empowered, oppressed, or passionate. Using these personal connections, interpretation prompts them to empathize with those seemingly different than themselves. While visitors may never personally know the brutality of slavery, for example, they can at least empathize with feelings of oppression from personal experiences, allowing them to better contextual the horrors of slavery as an endless system of total subjugation. This approach changes the lens through which

visitors view the past. Instead of perceiving certain narratives as “my” history versus “their” history, visitors make connections to the past through recollections of shared experiences.

As the NPS shifts “towards this interactive and audience-centered model, it means that a lot of [interpretive] skill sets are starting to amp up in complexity.” Rudy claims that because newer models of interpretation are “not about delivery; they're about reactivity;” interpreters need specific training to conduct successful dialogic interpretation.<sup>101</sup> This is a tall order for most parks, which are typically understaffed and underfunded. While there is support from IE&V and the Mather Training Center, this does not mean the vision for the dialogic approach has trickled down to regional and park leadership.

To better gauge how this shift is occurring in the field, especially at the National Mall and Memorial Parks and Anacostia Park, I conducted a series of oral history interviews with members of leadership teams, superintendents, chiefs of interpretation, and field rangers, representing varied perspectives and approaches from the discipline. Collaborating with the Park History Office over the spring and summer of 2019, I interviewed a total of seven interpreters working in the field at the National Mall and Anacostia Park, in the Washington Office of Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers (Washington, DC) and in the Interpretive Development Program at the Mather Training Center (West Virginia). After indexing the interviews, I sent the transcriptions and recordings to the Park History Office which is in the process of storing the materials the

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<sup>101</sup> John Rudy, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

National Archives and Records Administration for preservation purposes. These interviews, while informing my research, will also be available to the public. They are an important part of the National Park Service's ongoing efforts to document its own practices.<sup>102</sup>

The interviews shed light on how interpretive rangers are using audience-centered methodologies in the field, the thought process behind creating interpretive training materials, and the influence leadership support has on adopting newer methods of interpretation. A number of the interpreters interviewed had decades of experience working in parks across the United States in Alaska, Oregon, California, Arizona, Wyoming, Maryland, West Virginia, and Washington, D.C. Others were fairly new to the field. Those who recently joined the National Park Service (within the last ten years) were more willing to engage with newer interpretive methods such as audience centered engagement.<sup>103</sup> Some of the more established interpreters actively supported and promoted the Facilitated Dialogue and Audience Centered Engagement, but most were in supervisory and leadership positions and were no longer in the field creating their own programs. While several interpreters received formal education in history, others had backgrounds in education, environmental sciences, and banking. The broad range of experience levels and geographic diversity represented provides a glimpse at how interpretation is implemented both top down and bottom up in parks and programs across

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<sup>102</sup> Dr. Lu Ann Jones, a member of the Park History Office, has led an effort to document the histories and perspectives of personnel within the NPS. Other graduate students such as Perri Meldon have contributed to the ongoing success of this program.

<sup>103</sup> A number of interpreters who had been with NPS for decades were not necessarily unwilling to use newer methods, in some cases they supported them, but many were in managerial positions and supervisors and were no longer in the field themselves.

the United States. Despite their differences, these interpreters all expressed passion for their work. Creating meaningful interpretation was not a “nine to five” occupation; it was an important part of their identity, and they each had their own unique approach and outlook on how to facilitate a successful interpretative experience.

All of those interviewed felt it was important to spark visitors’ curiosity and provide not only informative, but inspirational interpretation. They also acknowledged the importance of challenging themselves and seeking training and other learning opportunities. Vince Vaise, current Chief of Interpretation and Education at the National Capital Parks-East, began his career at Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine in Baltimore, Maryland. Vaise described the site, which interprets the history of the War of 1812 between the United States and the British, as “the feel-good site.” Vaise explains that “there's no real lingering anger over that war...[and] not only did [the United States] win the battle, we got the national anthem out of it with this big flag, which is this huge icon that everyone loves, most American love it.”<sup>104</sup> While the seasoned chief of interpretation enjoyed his time at Fort McHenry, he wanted to delve into more challenging interpretation. His superintendent at the time “saw some talent in [him],” and supported him in seeking different experiences at the same park. Opportunities for growth and advancement, however, vary from park to park, and in Vaise’s case, support from his superintendent was an important part of his early career trajectory.

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<sup>104</sup> Vince Vaise, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey, (National Capital Parks East, Washington, DC: May 6, 2019).

There is a growing awareness among interpretive leadership about the importance of supporting field rangers and encouraging them to develop their skills. For Julia Washburn, former Associate Director of IE&V, creating interpretive trainings and resources was an important part of her career. While working as a supervisory park ranger for interpretation at Rock Creek Park early in her career, Washburn took frequent trips to the Mather Training Center in West Virginia to “help design training programs and use [her] pedagogical and curricular development skills in working on interpretive training.” With a background in environmental science and education, she focused on innovating resources that reinforced the idea that parks were not only fun vacation spots, but places where students could gain knowledge and participate in immersive learning.

Washburn was later hired by Director Jonathan Jarvis to serve as the first Associate Director of the Washington Office of Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers, working with parks to realize Jarvis’ vision for greater education initiatives in parks. She later accepted the position of superintendent of Rock Creek where she currently serves. While no longer directly involved in creating interpretive resources, Washburn’s experience as an educator, interpretive trainer, and member of the interpretive leadership team gives her unique insight into how leadership support and accessible, high-quality resources enhance an interpreter’s skills and ability in the field. Expressing a desire to be more involved in the interpretation of her park’s stories, Washburn explained that she supports educational opportunities for her staff and “frequently recommend[s] trainings for [her] interpreters.” As someone who was once actively involved in creating trainings for NPS interpreters and educators, she is “always looking for great opportunities for [interpreters] to learn about audience centered

programming.” She stressed the importance of taking training on interpreting challenging topics like slavery and she talked about some of the more inclusive stories her park is interpreting (such as Elizabeth Proctor Thomas, a free African American woman who donated her land for the construction of the Union Fort Stevens during the Civil War). Washburn advocates for a dialogic approach to interpretation and championed these ideas during her time as Associate Director of IE&V when she helped implement the NPS interpretive resource “Achieving Relevance in Our Second Century.”<sup>105</sup>

Others in the field also recognize the importance of supporting interpretive staff, including Paul Ollig, Chief of Interpretation and Education at the National Mall and Memorial Parks.<sup>106</sup> Ollig is a proponent of providing training to his staff; in fact, one of his “favorite things to do is to work on professional development coaching with the people in [his] division.” He originally attended graduate school for environmental education and worked at predominantly western parks including Grand Teton National Park, Glacier National Park, and Yosemite National Park and began his career interpreting natural resources. With a “passion [for] telling the stories of natural ecosystems and processes-geology, biology,” he sought opportunities to learn about historical interpretation, and he “wanted to challenge [himself] and understand what an interpreter needed to do to interpret an event or a person.” This interest in interpreting both natural and culture resources is unusual in the National Park Service as “a lot of park rangers don't have that crossover experience; they either focus on natural history parks or

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<sup>105</sup> Julia Washburn, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey, (Rock Creek Park, Washington, DC: May 21, 2019).

<sup>106</sup> At the time of the interview, Ollig was Chief of Interpretation and Education at National Mall and Memorial but has since accepted a permanent position at Denali National Park and Preserve.

they focus on historical parks.” This cross-disciplinary approach, however, made Ollig a more skilled interpreter and he describe it as an “incredibly beneficial” experience that allowed him “to see how the interpretive skills can be applied in very similar ways in both disciplines.”<sup>107</sup> His experience interpreting cultural history helped him grow as a professional, and Ollig encourages rangers working on the National Mall to take advantage of similar opportunities as his ranger to accept similar opportunities as “the best interpreters that [he] experienced are the ones that have that breadth of experience, where they take themselves out of their comfort zone.”

Ollig’s ability to bridge concepts associated with both natural and cultural resources made him a more effective interpreter and likely opened up advancement opportunities. He explained that “as a natural history person, learning the diplomacy and the sensitivity of talking about contemporary issues can dramatically enhance your ability to connect with people on other issues.” Ollig shares this advice with the interpreters who work for him and “one of [his] biggest recommendations to anybody that comes into work with [him]... is to look for that diversity of experiences.” He encourages interpreters to take trainings to better hone their skills, to try new programming, to research and eventually interpret a topic they were unfamiliar with, and to accept detail and promotional opportunities.<sup>108</sup>

Susan Philpott, an interpretive ranger at the National Mall and Memorial Parks, is one such individual who took advantage of audience centered experience training. She is

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<sup>107</sup> Paul Ollig, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey, (Division of Interpretation and Education, National Mall and Memorial Parks, Washington, DC: May 15, 2019).

<sup>108</sup> A detail is a short-term position (usually a few months) where a member of the agency applies and is hired to work in a vacant position. Details allow people in the NPS to gain experience in a position and then return to their former role.

typically stationed at the Belmont Paul Women’s Equality National Monument, a site incorporated as part of the National Mall. Designated a National Monument by President Obama in 2016, the monument interprets the story of women’s suffrage and the National Woman’s Party, which used the house as its headquarters beginning in the 1920s. Originally beginning her career in banking, Philpott applied for the National Park Service in 2009. While she lacked any formal education or training on interpretive pedagogy or methodologies, she convinced the hiring superintendent that “this was work [she] could do, that [she] had transferable skills.” After working in the field for five years, she enrolled in graduate school for public history, eventually earning her master’s degree. Working as a field ranger at the Belmont Paul House, Philpott quickly became an expert in women’s history and in 2019 applied and accepted a 120-day temporary assignment working as the Nineteenth Amendment Interpretive Ranger at the Cultural Resources of Interpretation and Education based in the Washington Service Office in Washington, DC. Over the four month assignment, she supported NPS efforts in commemorating the centennial of the amendment by providing much needed research support and writing web content for the newly launched NPS “Women’s History” website. Philpott explains that the temporary assignment gave her an opportunity to research more about the women’s suffrage movement, and specifically the National Woman Party’s involvement in the movement, something she struggles to find time for while stationed at the Belmont Paul House.

Philpott, a skilled and engaging interpreter, has a lot to offer the curious visitor. But she is also a trained historian, and her research and writing skills are in high demand, especially with the impending commemoration of the Nineteenth Amendment. The

conundrum of how to divide her time—in the Belmont Paul House providing guided tours to the public or in private offices researching and writing much needed content—speaks to the enduring split between history (as an academic pursuit) and interpretation (as a methodology to engage the public in a conversation about the past). Philpott’s situation is unique, however, as most trained historians are not usually engaged in interpretative practice. In fact, most of the positions with the title “historian” “might not be recognizable as such.”<sup>109</sup> Historians in the NPS are usually not out in the field and are instead more involved in managing the agency’s many cultural resource management programs.

While Philpott’s temporary assignment provided her with the time to conduct scholarly research that contributes to the NPS’s broader effort to commemorate the Nineteenth Amendment, she rarely has the time to research and write while stationed at the Belmont Paul House, indicating a failure on the part of the management of the National Mall and Memorial Parks. When Belmont Paul temporarily closes in the fall of 2020 for renovations, Philpott speculates that she will likely be stationed at the Washington Monument. Rangers at in this location usually engage less in dialogic interaction and are expected to respond to visitor questions about directions and bathrooms. Philpott’s time and talents would be better spent training other interpreters about the Audience Centered Engagement method (something she already does occasionally, again, when she has time away from her duties).

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<sup>109</sup> Whisnant, *Imperiled Promise*, 15.

With her research and writing abilities, Philpott would also be an asset to the Nineteenth Amendment Centennial Commemoration working group. While there is a dedicated group of people across the NPS working to support the commemoration (though web development, creating education materials, arranging public partnerships, etc.) these folks take on the tasks in addition to their usual workloads. The materials they produce as part of this commemoration are also receiving attention from state and national lawmakers, putting additional pressure on these working groups to produce sound scholarship and engaging material.<sup>110</sup> Receiving additional support from someone like Philpott would be invaluable, especially as she is not only a historian, but someone who has worked extensively at one of the only two NPS units affiliated with the women's suffrage movement.

Philpott's story is indicative of a larger trend in the NPS, reflecting how the agency undervalues the role of cultural resource experts, including historians, archaeologists, public historians, historic preservationists, architects, and more. According to a report issued through the collaboration of the Organization of American Historians and the National Park Service in 2011, of the agency's 22,000 permanent, seasonal, and temporary staff, only 182 have the official title of "historian." While two-thirds of the agency's 419 units contain historical and cultural significance, less than one percent of its staff are historians.<sup>111</sup> There are, however, a number of personnel who conduct historical research that do not bear the title "historians," yet they often have

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<sup>110</sup> As the National Park Service works closely with the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission, representative appointed by Congress to coordinate national efforts to raise awareness about the centennial, and the commission actively refers state governments to the NPS "Women's History" as a resource. Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission website, <https://www.womensvote100.org/>.

<sup>111</sup> Whisnant, *Imperiled Promise*. 15.

many other duties and responsibilities. The lack of officially identified historians reveals that the NPS does not employ nearly enough content experts to adequately support park and program needs, both in terms of park management as well as producing scholarship, leaving NPS far behind current scholarly standards for the field. Perhaps even more startling, the OAH report does not address the number of other professions also underrepresented in the structure of the agency, including archaeologists and historic preservationists. Instead of employing professionals in their fields, staff are often required to work outside their area of expertise.<sup>112</sup>

By contrast, higher prioritization of historical research and scholarly publications would give the NPS the opportunity to capitalize upon contemporary historical trends. While scholars have devoted attention to social history since the 1970s and 1980s, the NPS has only recently explored this line of inquiry. As a federal agency, the National Park Service has, in the past, focused predominantly on the history of the privileged white male leaders who undeniably played a role in shaping the formation of the country. But the history of the United States encompasses more than the stories of token figures such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and as this chapter has addressed, the National Park Service has attempted to create a more multivocal narrative in the past several decades. But as this chapter has addressed, the scarcity of historians who are actively engaged in creating scholarly standards negatively affects the accuracy of its interpretation, from its in-person interpretive programs, to its museum exhibits, and even its web content.

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<sup>112</sup> Instead, as noted earlier in this chapter, many historians are busy managing programs like the National Register of Historic Places or responding to section 106 requirements.

However, parks are beginning to seek out the underrepresented stories of their site. At some units, such as the National Mall, interpreters have a great deal of freedom in choosing the topics of their ranger-led tours. According to Philpott and other interpreters I spoke with informally, rangers working at the Mall “basically could create a program on anything that interested [them].”<sup>113</sup> For example, rangers present on topics ranging from the lives of the presidents to the geological significance of the stones used to construct the monuments. These programs do not have to be fully planned or researched before rangers present them to their superiors for approval, nor are the programs documented or recorded for future use. While this allowed rangers the freedom to interpret almost any topic in American history, it also takes away from the power of that place. As interpretive trainer John Rudy noted, this freedom to interpret anything distracts rangers from communicating the history of the landscape itself. Citing Sarah Vowell’s book *Assassination Vacation*, Rudy likens the “National Mall [to] America’s Tupperware because it holds whatever the dish is,” meaning that any narrative can be told in that space, connected through the monuments and memorials. This does not mean, however, that those narratives are connected to that space specifically. He elaborated further, “the Mall is weird in that we’re not telling the story of the place, we’re telling you the story of the use of the place.” This is problematic as the NPS mission is based on the practice of telling stories specifically tied to place, and the deviation away from the history of the built landscape allows more challenging and contested stories to go unrecognized,

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<sup>113</sup> Susan Philpott, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey, (Washington Support Office, Washington, DC: August 13, 2019).

including the history of the Poor People's Campaign and Bonus Army, two moments in history that are still largely uninterpreted by the NPS.

To date, the National Mall has only offered one program on the Poor People's Campaign, coordinated for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event in the summer of 2018. The program was conceptualized by Education Specialist Jennifer Epstein who was known for her work on civil rights educational content. She was "very interested in the Poor People's Campaign and Resurrection City," and approached Philpott about doing the program as Philpott was "known for being really interested in the Civil Rights stories." As content experts, the two NPS staff members were already well aware of the demonstration and its historical significance. Without Epstein's and Philpott's historical knowledge of the event, it is difficult to determine if the NPS would have offered any programming on the Poor People's Campaign.

Working collaboratively, Epstein oversaw the implementation of the activity while Philpott provided primary research and content. Philpott described Epstein as the "initiator" who reached out to Philpott as she had written her master's thesis on the Black civil rights movement in Washington, DC. Philpott had also provided training on interpreting civil rights history to fellow rangers working on the Mall. Epstein and Philpott also invited interpretive media specialist for the Mall Glen Klaus to help promote the event.

The program, offered as a Junior Ranger activity for children and young adults, was set up along the south side of the Reflecting Pool, in the original location of Resurrection City. Visitors wandering by were invited to participate; supplied with four wooden stakes and a ribbon, they mapped out the dimensions of the dwellings that once

stood on site. Participants then decorated their own flag with slogans and pictures and planted it in the outline of their structure, symbolizing the artwork demonstrators created on their plywood homes during the summer of 1968. Those who participated in the activity also receive a limited-edition Junior Ranger badge, a coveted item for those children and young adults who participate in the Junior Ranger program.<sup>114</sup> While a fun incentive for participants, the creation of a specific badge for this program also indicates the initiative the NPS personnel undertook to organize the program. Junior Ranger badges must be designed and created, and agency money must be allocated to fund this process. The Poor People’s Campaign program was clearly a well-planned and thoroughly researched endeavor.

In addition to the activity, the three rangers created a temporary exhibit with several large wind boards with images of Resurrection City. Visitors were encouraged to view the historic photographs from 1968 and then observe the landscape in its current form, connecting what it looked like today with the historical images. As the rangers were finalizing the activity with participants with stakes and ribbons dotting this section of the Mall, Philpott described how “anybody walking by could imagine all those dwellings there in that space, what it was like when people were camping out on that part of the Mall.”<sup>115</sup> This visualization was important as the current landscape is a flat, grassy field that gives no indication of the small city that once occupied the space.

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<sup>114</sup> The Junior Ranger program is an “activity based program conducted in almost all parks,” that encourages children and young adults to engage with parks. “Become a Junior Ranger,” Kids in Parks website, National Park Service, accessed October 26, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/kids/become-a-junior-ranger.htm>.

<sup>115</sup> Susan Philpott, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

The Bonus Army's occupation of the capital in the summer of 1932 also lacks interpretation, yet it is at least becoming a topic of interest within the NPS, particularly in Anacostia Park where the veterans camped. When asked about visitors' awareness of the demonstration, Chief of Interpretation Vince Vaise (who is stationed at the National Capital Parks East in Anacostia Park) admits that "the layperson doesn't know...historically it [the demonstration] was swept under the rug even when it happened." He speculates that this story and others like it are unexamined in scholarship and in interpretation because most "Americans don't like to remember our less positive...elements, and tear gassing our veterans is considered not a good thing to do. We don't want to remember that stuff, so it's not taught as much." Vaise, however, believes there is "an awakening to it...for a number of reasons." He describes the park's current efforts to interpret this chapter in American history, including an annual bike tour that focuses exclusively on the Bonus Army. The program begins in Anacostia Park where the interpreter describes the circumstances that galvanized veterans to march on Washington (demands for payment for their military service), framing the demonstration in context to national events such as World War I and the Great Depression. As the program continues, the bike tour leads to Capitol Hill where the interpreter provides details about the ensuing protests and veterans' attempts to lobby Congress. Participants then retrace General MacArthur's route toward Anacostia where he and the United States Army eventually evicted demonstrators.

A comprehensive program about the Bonus Army, this tour is only offered once a year, and the park usually has more people attend than they can accommodate, indicating a local interest in the topic. Vaise also describes how he gets requests about the Bonus

Army from time to time. There was even interest from a commanding officer at Fort McNair who requested a staff tour focused on the history of the Bonus Army. Vaise, who is in a position of authority to make decisions about his park's interpretation, intends to "train up some of the permanent folks, so that [the park] can offer that program more frequently." He is also planning a series of interpretive panels about the place-based history of his park with images of what the landscape looked like at specific periods of time. One of the interpretive panels includes information about the Bonus Army, as well as photographs of where the men camped along the river. While a small step in acknowledging the presence of the veterans, the wayside marker is at least a tangible reminder of the demonstration.<sup>116</sup>

Unlike Anacostia Park, the National Mall is not embracing the story of the Poor People's Campaign as effectively. Interpreting contested histories connected with race and class are arguably more challenging at the National Mall versus Anacostia Park due to differences in audiences. Both places of twentieth century occupation protests, these two park units attract different audiences and offer varied experiences. While Anacostia Park often draws locals for recreation purposes, with its biking and running trails, accessible boat and fishing ramps, picnic shelters, and basketball and tennis courts, the National Mall is notable for its iconic monuments that attract visitors from across the world. Accordingly, interpretation varies to address the different audiences that visit each park.

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<sup>116</sup> Vince Vaise, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

Despite Philpott's intentions to revive Junior Ranger program from 2018, no further interpretation on the Poor People's Campaign has been offered on the National Mall. While Philpott expressed a desire to continue interpreting the demonstration, she is currently busy supporting NPS efforts to commemorate the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment. She concedes that there was interest in placing a historical marker on the spot where protesters camped on the south side of the Reflecting Pool, yet there has been no attempt by leadership of the National Mall and Memorial Parks to make this a reality.

The National Park Service does formally acknowledge these two demonstrations in its digital interpretation. On the Anacostia Park NPS.gov website, under the "Learn about the park" navigation heading, visitors can find information about the history of the park, including its association with the Bonus Army. While there is a short paragraph about the demonstration, users can click on a link to an NPS article that provides a comprehensive history about the veteran's demand for the bonus, their planned march on Washington, the camp in Anacostia, and the political ramifications of their eviction by the U.S. Army.

There is less digital interpretation on the Poor People's Campaign as the National Mall's website does not offer any information about it. However, Philpott authored an NPS article about the campaign using research she found as part of the Junior Ranger program. The article describes the impetus for the campaign and protesters' journey to the capital city as well as the details of demonstration. It recognizes that while current scholarship and public discourse perceive the campaign as a failure, the demonstration was "successful in launching several food and school lunch initiatives," and perhaps more "importantly, the Poor People's Campaign changed the national conversation about

poverty and hunger. It united poor people from different communities in common purpose to fight alongside each other for economic justice.”<sup>117</sup> Despite the effort that went into planning the program on the Poor People’s Campaign, it has not been resurrected since its debut in the summer of 2018, nor was it recorded for future rangers to mimic. Initiated by educators and interpreters with a historical background in civil rights history, this level of expertise made the program successful in that the activity relied on primary research. Epstein’s and Philpott’s work on the Junior Ranger program denotes the importance of having cultural resource experts inform public interpretation.

The National Mall and Anacostia Park have at some point within the last few years offered a program on the two demonstrations, but neither protest has become a critical part of either park’s interpretation. When comparing the two demonstrations, there is clearly more effort toward interpreting the history of the Bonus Army. This is due to several reasons. Vaise is relatively new to Anacostia within the last few years (coming from Fort McHenry), and he has shown enthusiasm to interpret this history. As Chief of Interpretation for National Capital Parks East, he has the power to make this part of their interpretation. At the National Mall, it was Epstein and Philpott who led efforts to interpret the Poor People’s Campaign, yet they are not in a position to make decisions about long-term interpretive priorities. Ollig, who was Chief of Interpretation, was open to interpreting diverse stories and noted that one of the National Mall’s interpretive themes is “the stage for democracy.” According to Ollig, this means talking with visitors about “how many First Amendment activities happen annually on the National Mall.” In

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<sup>117</sup> “Resurrection City,” National Park Service website, accessed October 26, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/resurrection-city.htm>.

fact, one of his objectives is to “try to ensure that every visitor who comes to this park not only has an enjoyable experience and a meaningful experience, but leaves here with a better understanding of what their role is in improving our democracy...[and] part of that conversation is talking about the protests.” As a nonpartisan agency, the National Park Service does not weigh in on the issues themselves, instead, interpretation revolves around the question of “why do people choose *this* place to come and assemble.”<sup>118</sup> But Ollig has recently accepted a position at Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska and it is unclear how his absence will influence the future trajectory of the Mall’s interpretation.

John Rudy, interpretive specialist at Mather Training Center, also speculates that there is deeper reason the Bonus Army is becoming a more acceptable topic of interpretation and not the Poor People’s Campaign. He explains that the National Park Service can effectively interpret the “easy stories, and dusty stories,” yet the past becomes more challenging to interpret when it involves recent people and events. Rudy explains that when such stories “require us to share the agency’s and the government’s sins, they become more troublesome. Things like the Bonus Army, [are] the government’s sin, but it’s dusty enough.” He describes how while the Bonus Army does not paint a flattering picture of the federal government’s handling of the veterans, yet almost a century has passed, making it easier to acknowledge the mismanagement of the veterans’ eviction. Interpreting the Poor People’s Campaign remains a challenge as this is one of the stories that “make [NPS] look guilty.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Paul Ollig, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

<sup>119</sup> John Rudy, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey.

## **Conclusion**

In the centuries since Congress designated Washington, DC the nation's capital, citizens have continually confronted their elected officials over the accessibility of public space. While many sites of struggle and conflict have been erased from the modern topography, their legacy continues to inform public land use today. These efforts were, however, sporadic and in some cases temporary. An examination of the National Park Service's past in terms of its development as a federal agency has much to bear on the present due to its role in shaping modern land management practices, preservation standards, and interpretive techniques. The National Park Service has the unique challenge of interpreting over 400 natural and cultural sites across the country, communicating the significance of a park's natural and cultural resources. The agency has made significant strides in creating a culture of inclusivity that values engaging interpretive techniques, yet much improvement is needed if the agency wants to authentically embrace the challenge of interpreting all Americans' stories.

The National Park Service has begun to explore the stories of less visible members of society, including women, LGBTQ citizens, disabled Americans, and others. Agency mandates and interpretive training material encourage best practices in the field, including an emphasis on shared authority and interdisciplinary collaboration, concepts first espoused by Verne Chatelain in the 1930s. While the interpretive process was originally heavily rooted in scholarly research, the reprioritizing of historians' tasks in the mid-twentieth century and unwillingness to engage other cultural experts (such as archeologists and landscape architects) in the process of creating in-person programming had allowed interpretive standards to fall short of the agency's mission.

In its official documents, the NPS stresses the importance of its role as the nation's cultural and natural heritage. Its insistence on producing and consulting primary sources to inform its programs (at least on paper) is important especially considering that it is one of the key federal agencies tasked with crafting historical narratives about America's collective past. However, parks and programs have different levels of freedom and oversight when creating both personal and nonpersonal interpretation, and as previously noted, the NPS does not require rangers to have historical training even though some have little oversight when creating visitor programs about the past. This can result in the NPS promoting exclusionary narratives that fail to recognize the complexity of the past. The in-depth study of the National Park Service's interpretive training guides and interviews with interpretive staff reveal that while there are many personnel dedicated to presenting a more inclusive portrayal of the past, this endeavor is sporadic and not necessarily implemented service wide. This chapter reveals that the National Park Service is still not adequately addressing the history of American social movements, including the including the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign. While the agency has made progress in recognizing the more diverse stories of its parks, there is still room for improvement, which requires a commitment from both leadership in Washington as well as those working in parks.

## CHAPTER VI: THE LEGACY OF OCCUPATION PROTESTS IN THE CAPITOL

The marginal presence of the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign in American public consciousness is one of the prevailing themes throughout this dissertation. Previous chapters discussed how existing power structures disrupted and delegitimized the demonstrations, resulting in scholarship that effectively silenced perspectives of the protesters themselves. Their exclusion from the broader narrative of American history is part of an ongoing struggle over the power of representation, one that is rooted in the idea that the Bonus Army march and Poor People's Campaign do not possess the typical characteristics of "successful" protests. Explaining the complexity of these demonstrations and what they achieved can be challenging for interpreters, especially as they should be framed as part of larger social movements that changed the political landscape of the country and not as anomalous events.

The Bonus Army was not simply about former World War I soldiers protesting for their pay; it implies a larger conversation about how the government has historically treated (or mistreated) its veterans, a topic that has relevance today. Along the same line of inquiry, it is misleading to historicize the Poor People's Campaign as a protest exclusive to the Black Civil Rights Movement as it was also a demand for human rights for all Americans. As Martin Luther King Jr. sought to broaden the focus of the movement to include stakeholders of diverse ethnic backgrounds, he planned a demonstration that was dependent upon the participation of many different communities, and by extension, the Poor People's Campaign is also part of the Chicano Movement and the American Indian Movement. Perhaps this is also what makes interpreting this demonstration difficult—its connection to many different movements; it did not embody

one cause or identity, but instead embraced them all. Using these and other past events to connect to contemporary audiences is (and has always been) a critical aspect of the National Park Service's interpretive pedagogy. Indeed, interpretive resources such as the National Council for Interpretation, Volunteers, and Education's report, "Achieving Relevance in Our Second Century" and the Interpretive Development Program's "Foundations of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Interpretation," (discussed in the previous chapter) specifically link the importance of relating the past and present in order to create relevant and memorable interpretive programming.<sup>1</sup>

Innovating public interpretation about these demonstrations is further complicated by inherent biases in the body of primary evidence, which should prompt subject-matter experts to question the veracity of how these demonstrations are portrayed not only in academic scholarship, but also in public memory. As Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot explained in his study of the process of historical production, historians are not the only ones who influence how the past is interpreted and remembered. Indeed, it is often those members of society vying for control who shape perceptions of history and culture, a theory that can be applied to the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign. As demonstrated in chapters 3 and 4, officials at the highest levels of

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<sup>1</sup> "Achieving Relevance" specifically identifies framing park history and cultural resources into national contexts that are relevant to all Americans as one of its primary objectives. It reiterates the importance of focusing on the stories of themes such as women's history, Latino history, and civil rights history. Similarly, "Foundations of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Interpretation" stresses the role historical knowledge plays in informing the discipline. It claims interpreters should seek out scholarship and research in order to better connect historical meaning and modern perspectives. "Achieving Relevance in Our Second Century," National Council for Interpretation, Volunteers, and Education, National Park Service, (April 2014), 8. "Foundations of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Interpretation," National Park Service Interpretive Development Program, 2016.

government sought to prevent protesters from occupying Washington, DC.<sup>2</sup> Maligning the demonstrations, the federal government retained authority over the remembrance of the events as the National Park Service currently oversees and interprets these landscapes. Trouillot cautioned that “this variety of narrators is one of many indications that theories of history have a rather limited view of the field historical production,” implying that historians play a marginal role in informing shared recollections of the past.<sup>3</sup>

This selective remembrance is caused by the incomplete documentation of history; the continued erasure of the Bonus Army’s and Poor People’s Campaign’s tangible achievements through the selective creation, assembly, and interpretation of primary sources, a process articulated by Trouillot, is facilitated by silences in the historical record. Scholars then choose particular events to include or exclude from a coherent narrative. Trouillot’s words underscore the need to question the status quo in order to seek out perspectives missing from the historical record as the production of history is not an objective truth.<sup>4</sup> Reevaluating traditional narratives of the past is necessary in order to ascertain the voices of those once omitted. The process of recording,

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<sup>2</sup> After the U.S. Army evicted veterans from the Anacostia Flats, officers, including Chief of Staff of the War Department General Douglas MacArthur and Brigadier General P.L. Miles claimed that the veterans instigated the violence. These accounts were disputed by the media, yet the officers insisted that the troops acted bravely and handled themselves with restraint. Similarly, Congress sought to deter the 1968 campaign by taking the Department of Interior’s authority to grant access to public spaces for protest. Attorney General William D. Mitchell to Chief of Staff of the War Department General Douglas MacArthur, August 2, 1932, MS 0738, container 7, folder “MacArthur Report,” Historical Society of Washington, DC.

<sup>3</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

researching, writing, and interpreting the past should therefore entail constant inquiry and revision in order to promote inclusivity and identify bias.

This dissertation builds on this argument and examines how primary and secondary sources influence the interpretation of these two demonstrations in the parks where they took place. My research found that there was a lack of general interpretation (programming, museum exhibits, and wayside markers) at these sites. As these demonstrations are typically portrayed as ineffective in what literature does exist, they do not fit into the version of progress as often presented in American rhetoric, making it difficult for front line rangers to succinctly interpret these topics. To address these challenges, this chapter offers recommendations for how Anacostia Park and the National Mall can better incorporate these events into their interpretive goals.

As the National Park Service manages public lands where these protests occurred, it's vital to understand how the agency is interpreting, and in some cases omitting, these stories. While NPS resources (from both the Park History Office and the Washington Office of Interpretation, Education & Volunteers) stress the importance of doing primary and secondary research to inform interpretive programs, the demands of the park often prevent rangers from taking the time they need to conduct thorough research for their programs, and the available resources may be tainted with bias. Perhaps even more challenging is the lack of interpreter awareness or interest in these demonstrations. The Bonus Army receives little attention at Anacostia Park, and the Poor People's Campaign even less at the National Mall. This is problematic as the agency is specifically tasked with preserving and interpreting parks and their stories. Interpretation varies from park to park, yet it should always be place-based in keeping with the agency's founding

legislation.<sup>5</sup> As the NPS was established to conserve *places*, its interpretation should support this aspect of the mission. While Anacostia Park is attempting to offer increased programming on the Bonus Army, rangers on the National Mall often use the monuments and memorials to interpret topics not necessarily affiliated with that space. These programs cover a broad range of topics, yet they do not often address the events and people associated with this symbolic landscape.

While an intentional focus on the history of place is needed in NPS units, parks do have opportunities to incorporate broader topics of American history into their ranger talks, museum exhibits, and wayside markers. Civil War battlefields, for example, have the freedom to not only cover the conflict that took place within park boundaries; they can also interpret associated themes of slavery, emancipation, and Reconstruction that relate to history of the Civil War. Sites can make connections with other parks sharing similar histories to frame their unit as part of an interconnected system that interprets stories of national significance. Agency legislation reinforces this approach, specifically the National Park Service General Authorities Act of 1970, which stated that park units, “though distinct in character, are united through their inter-related purposes and resources into one national park system as cumulative expressions of a single national heritage;” a practice that is implemented sporadically across the agency.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Most interpretation the public encounters should be grounded in place, even if only tangentially. On the National Mall, for example, rangers used monuments and memorials to tell a broader story of American history. Online content and interpretation should also only feature people, events, and stories connected to places listed on the National Register, designated as National Historic Landmarks, or connected to NPS programs like the Historic American Building Survey, Historic American Engineering Record, and Historic American Landscapes Survey.

<sup>6</sup> “An Act to Improve the Administration of the National Park Service,” S. Rep. No. 91-1014 (1970); see H.R. Rep. No. 91-1265 (1970), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-84/pdf/STATUTE-84-Pg825.pdf>

Creating a more unified NPS that stresses the interconnectedness of parks would also support more interpretation around the history of social movements. Instead of presenting Anacostia Park as part of a broader national history, interpreters too often frame the unit and its history as isolated from the over four hundred other parks. Without the broader context, the true historical meaning and significance of the people and events associated with that site become lost. To address this disconnect, leadership within the agency should address the rigid hierarchical structure to create a culture that not only encourages collaboration across disciplines, but values all members of the NPS team, including volunteers, seasonal rangers, interns, and term employees – individuals who make significant contributions to the field. This requires those in leadership positions to engage with content experts and interpreters in parks by considering their feedback and treating them not as subordinates, but as equal partners in furthering the agency mission. By fostering a culture of support for those in the field and encouraging collaboration between practitioners, the National Park Service can better explore the untold stories of its units and serve as a model for other federal agencies seeking to create an inclusive historical narrative.

### **Memorializing the Bonus Army and Poor People’s Campaign**

Interpreting the history of the Bonus Army and Poor People’s Campaign comes with its own set of challenges. It is a tricky balance for government employees to authentically represent the perspectives of protesters when they are accountable to the authority figures within the federal hierarchical power structure. But front-line interpreters have an opportunity to connect the demonstrations to ongoing issues in the

present, engaging visitors in meaningful conversations and helping them find personal applicability in these stories. Programming on the Bonus Army, for example, should not focus solely on the history of the veterans' occupation of the capital; interpreters have the power to use this history to open a dialogue about veterans' ongoing struggles in the present, such as the challenge of integrating back into civilian life after combat or the inability to access proper care through the Veterans Administration. While the original Poor People's Campaign took place over fifty years ago, the country continues to face growing economic inequality as the richest members of society continue to increase their wealth at the expense of others. Both demonstrations have relevance today, and it is the role of the interpreters make the connection between past and present in a way that is meaningful and memorable. The National Park Service's lack of interpretation on either demonstration not only serves to further silence the protests from public memory, it is also a missed opportunity to co-create meaning and identify relevant connections between park resources and visitors – a method various NPS interpretive offices have been encouraging for the past decade.

As established in the previous chapter, little if any interpretation (including ranger programming, museum exhibits, and permanent wayside or other markers) currently exists on either demonstration. The ensuing recommendations focus predominantly on what the National Mall can do to better address the Poor People's Campaign as there is an ongoing effort at Anacostia Park to implement new forms of interpretation on the Bonus Army. While the parks each face challenges when creating new interpretation, both should at a minimum officially acknowledge the demonstrations through wayside markers in order to end the cycles of silence. Ascribing agency to the protesters is a

critical first step in engaging with these contested narratives, particularly as participants of the Bonus Army and the Poor People's Campaign struggled to control how the demonstrations were framed in public discourse. For example, World War I veterans established their own newspaper, the *B.E.F. News* to publicize their vision and goals for the occupation, allowing them to combat the misleading press coverage about the veterans' supposed ties with communist organizations. The newspaper became a tool for the veterans to share their stories from the mudflats of Anacostia. These papers are currently available at the Historical Society of Washington, DC. The Library of Congress also has an archive of historical photographs of the veterans' camp in Anacostia (available online). Both collections are ripe for research and would serve as good primary sources to include in interpretation.

Similarly, organizers of the Poor People's Campaign were also conscious about the power of the media in informing public support. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference organized a public exhibit on poverty in America, displayed near the grounds Smithsonian Castle. Intended to educate the visitors to the National Mall, the exhibit, manned by demonstrators, was a way to communicate the importance of the campaign and what it sought to achieve for ordinary Americans. While most of the information about the campaign's public outreach comes from National Park Service records, the organizer of the exhibit, Vincent De Forest, is a former member of the National Park Service. As he continues to live in the Washington area, interpreters on the National Mall could conduct an oral history interview with him to better learn about the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's vision for engaging with the public. The Smithsonian

Institution also cares for a collection of photographs of Resurrection City, a resource that could also be used to inform and enhance NPS interpretive programming.

Physical commemoration is necessary to help these two demonstrations permeate public consciousness. With approximately 25 million visitors to the National Mall each year, a commemorative marker on the former site of Resurrection City has the potential to reach a wide range of tourists.<sup>7</sup> Many visitors may not read the interpretive marker in full, but simply having the name of the demonstration would perhaps spark curiosity among visitors and at the very least suggest that something significant happened in that place. While the process of proposing a new monument or memorial is often an up-hill battle, it is a necessary one. As the mission of the National Park Service centers on preserving historic sites, the agency has a unique obligation to recognize these demonstrations in the places where they happened.<sup>8</sup>

Demonstrators sought to narrate their version of events, yet existing accounts from participants are limited and do not incorporate the perspectives of the thousands of other individuals who took part in the demonstrations.<sup>9</sup> The omission of their perspectives from public memory is not the only moment of erasure; their legacy continues to be silenced as long as the National Park Service refuses to acknowledge and memorialize the demonstrations on the landscapes of the National Mall and Anacostia Park. While memorialization always involved power dynamics, usually over the control of collective

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<sup>7</sup> “National Mall Plan: Summary: Enriching Our American Experience, Envisioning a New Future,” National Park Service, (2010), <https://www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan/Documents/Media/NAMA%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Proposing an NPS approved wayside marker would be a more feasible suggestion as public monuments and memorials need approval from Congress.

<sup>9</sup> Particularly lacking are accounts from women who were integral part of both protests.

memory, this process has become even more complicated in recent decades with the enactment of legislation regulating the addition of new monuments on the National Mall.<sup>10</sup> Attempting to preserve the landscape of the capital and its resemblance to Pierre L’Enfant’s original eighteenth-century design, Congress enacted the Commemorative Works Act (CWA) in 1986 to oversee the construction of new monuments in Washington, DC. The act requires that any additions be approved by the National Capital Memorial Advisory Committee, and it limits where these structures can be built. Dividing the capital into three sections – the Reserve, Area I, and Area II – the CWA prohibits any new construction in the Reserve, and Congressional approval is required to erect monuments in Area I. The process for proposing memorials in Area II is more feasible but still requires authorization from the National Park Service and the General Services Administration. As the Reserve includes the horizontal strip of land extending from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial as well as the space around the Tidal Basin, this area is heavily regulated to maintain the iconic lines of sight from the monuments to the federal buildings.<sup>11</sup> The Commemorative Works Act allows for exemptions, and several new monuments may soon be added to the capital landscape, including the Dwight D.

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<sup>10</sup> Kirk Savage’s *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape*, describes the process of designating and distributing monuments in the capital from its founding up through the presence and how this ascribes symbolism to the built environment. Martha Norkunas’ work documenting memorials in the town of Lowell, Massachusetts further reveals the significance monuments have in solidifying public memory. Alternatively, those events and people omitted from public commemoration in this way are further erased from the nation’s shared consciousness. Kirk Savage’s *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Martha Norkunas, *Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Jacob R. Straus, “Commemorative Works in the District of Columbia: Background and Practice,” Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service (March 10, 2015), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R41658.pdf>

Eisenhower Memorial, a Korean War Veterans Memorial Wall of Remembrance, and a National Desert Storm and Desert Shield Memorial. There is even a pending request to conduct an environmental assessment for a Memorial to Victims of the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-1933, yet there are no official plans to memorialize the Poor People's Campaign.<sup>12</sup>

Notably, the Anacostia area is not included on the CWA map, indicating a lack of Congressional concern over the commemorative landscape in this part of the city. Clearly not all sections of the capital embody the same level of symbolism; the National Mall is the monumental core with outlying areas existing as important public spaces that frame the meaning of the central landscape. But Anacostia, located across the river, is an outlier, not tapped into the same heritage tourism as other sections of the city. While the Anacostia neighborhood boasts famous historic sites such as the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, the area does not attract as many visitors as sites in the heart of Washington, D.C. In 2018, for example, the various Smithsonian museums located on the National Mall attracted anywhere from approximately 133,000 to 6 million visitors.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, located on the south side of the river, attracted a little over 33,000 visitors that year, indicating that while less visited by tourists, the area has a strong community culture and identity that sets it apart.

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<sup>12</sup> "National Mall and Memorial Parks," Planning, Environment & Public Comment, accessed November 09, 2019, <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/parkHome.cfm?parkID=427>.

<sup>13</sup> The less frequently attended Smithsonian Museum on the National Mall include the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (133,503), the National Museum of African Art (141,890) with more popular museum like the National Air and Space Museum (6.2M), and the National Museum of Natural History (4.8) attracting most attention. "Visitor Stats," Smithsonian Institution website, accessed November 10, 2019, <https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/about/stats>

## **Recommendations for Interpreting the Legacy of the Bonus Army**

Anacostia Park and the surrounding community exudes a culture distinct from other neighborhoods of Washington, D.C. Separated from central D.C. by the river, this neighborhood has historically been underdeveloped since the city's founding in 1791. Today, residents of this area continue to make disproportionately less than locals living in other sections of the city. Unlike more well-known neighborhoods of the capital, such as Capitol Hill, Federal Center, and Adams Morgan, Anacostia sees far fewer tourists.<sup>14</sup> Legislation like the Commemorative Works Act reinforces the power of the federal government not only in influencing the laws of the city, but also the physical landscape itself. The dichotomy between the local and national both in terms of who is visiting these two parks as well as how the history is interpreted remains one of the challenges the parks encounter when addressing the demonstrations. While located only a few miles from the National Mall, Anacostia caters to a different type of audience than the National Mall. Accordingly, the park's interpretation emphasizes local resources and attempts to offer programming for the nearby community (a tactic many smaller parks also adopt). Typically, National Park Service units adhere closely to their enabling legislation, interpreting the history of their park in a local and regional context. They are usually less successful at connecting their site's stories with broader historical trends. Anacostia's focus, for example, is predominantly on local ecology, and much of its interpretive programming and educational resources center on the flora and fauna of the watershed.

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<sup>14</sup> Residents of Washington, DC slowly lost their voting rights in the 1870s and did not regain them until the passage of the Home Rule Act in 1973. "District of Columbia Home Rule Act," Public Law 93-198; 87 Stat. 774, (December, 1973), [https://dccouncil.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Home%20Rule%20Act%202013%20\(2-11-14\).pdf](https://dccouncil.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Home%20Rule%20Act%202013%20(2-11-14).pdf).

The park has made an effort to interpret its cultural resources in context to national history. Much of this effort is being led by Chief of Interpretation and Visitors Service of the National Capital Parks, East, Vince Vaise, who was recently hired to fill this position. Vaise, originally stationed at Fort McHenry National Monument and Historic Shrine in Baltimore, has expressed enthusiasm for interpreting the history of the Bonus Army and plans to expand interpretation in various forms. This kind of supervisory encouragement is the kind of support frontline interpreters need when incorporating little known histories, a practice that merits encouragement and throughout the NPS.

As of the summer of 2019, Anacostia Park offered limited interpretation on the Bonus Army, which entailed an annual ranger-led bicycle tour and a brief description of the demonstration on the Anacostia Park NPS.gov website. With a section of its website devoted to the history of the unit, the park features a paragraph on the veterans' occupation of the mudflats during the summer of 1932. This web content includes a link to a more extensive National Park Service article about the demonstration. While a seemingly minor tribute to the veterans, the park's inclusion of the demonstration as part of its unit's history (on its official website) identifies it as a legitimate topic of interpretation, establishing a foundation for future programming.

The park's annual bicycle program traces the demonstration on the landscape (described in the previous chapter); as this program is usually filled to capacity, more extensive interpretation is needed to meet visitors demands. Vaise described how the bicycle tour attempts to put the demonstration in context to both local and national history, touching on the veterans' service in World War I and the influence of the Great

Depression as a galvanizing force for their mobilization to Washington. The program also focuses on the response of the residents of Washington, DC, many of whom donated money and supplies to the veterans.

While interpreters at Anacostia Park are in the process of incorporating the Bonus Army as a topic of interpretation, there are (as of yet) no permanent markers or waysides acknowledging the veterans' presence in the capital. According to Vaise, the park is in the process of designing a wayside marker that will provide a brief historical overview of the protest as well as a photograph of veterans camping along the river. Vaise intends to have the marker placed in the spot where the photograph was originally taken to evoke a "sense of place" that will prompt visitors to appreciate how the landscape has changed over time.<sup>15</sup> The Chief of Interpretation admits that unlike some units, Anacostia Park's historical and cultural connection is not immediately apparent. He hopes new wayside markers about the history of the landscape will change that, providing visitors with a deeper sense of the significance of the place in shaping local and national history.

The biggest challenge Vaise faces is a lack of field interpreters to offer this and other programs. While the park would benefit from hiring new staff to devote more energy to interpretive programming, Anacostia Park could, in the meantime, work with Capitol Hill Parks to offer joint programming on the Bonus Army as veterans spent much of their time near the Capitol Building lobbying Congress and protesting. By offering a program on Capitol Hill, or starting the bicycle tour from this location, the NPS could attract a broader audience of visitors. As Anacostia is typically frequented by locals,

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<sup>15</sup> Vince Vaise, Interview with Katherine Crawford-Lackey, (National Capital Parks East, Washington, DC: May 6, 2019).

working with Capitol Hill Parks to expand interpretation would bring the history of the Bonus Army to tourists visiting from all over the world.

Taking the story of the Bonus Army from the more local setting in Anacostia to the national stage of the National Mall and Capitol Hill would help make it a more mainstream part of NPS interpretation, but the demonstration's connection to Anacostia should not be lost in the process. The framing of the Bonus Army march and the Poor People's Campaign as local and national is an important point to make when interpreting this history. The protests attracted participants from across the country and the long-term occupation of the capital attracted nation-wide press coverage. The goals of the two demonstrations also called for a federal response to their economic struggles. But the occupations also had profound local implications; in both cases, local support was critical in establishing legitimacy and sustaining protesters. For the Bonus Army, the DC Metropolitan Police Department in some ways advocated for the veterans and sought to find them adequate shelter during the prolonged protests. Similarly, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's ability to secure a permit for West Potomac Park relied heavily on local leader and former Delegate to the US House of Representatives Walter Fauntroy.<sup>16</sup> Without local involvement, these demonstrations would have been short lived and may never have taken place at all, underscoring the need to interpret these demonstrations in context to the local communities as well as integrate it in a broader narrative.

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<sup>16</sup> Fauntroy's complicated history, including his arrest for fraud and his opposition to gay marriage, may explain why his role in facilitating the Poor People's Campaign is downplayed in scholarship and official interpretation.

Staff at Anacostia Park could reassess how they interpret the history of the Bonus Army by addressing the impact the veterans' occupation had on the development of the Anacostia neighborhood. While the annual bicycle tour examines the response of the Washington, DC community, this is an opportunity to explore more about how the veterans shaped the development of the Anacostia region in general. Originally established as the "working-class" area of the city in the nineteenth century, people of color were barred from purchasing property in this part of the capital. The area remained underdeveloped into the early twentieth century and was considered one of the poorer sections of town. White residents began to move to the suburbs in the mid-twentieth century, and the construction of a highway furthered white flight. Anacostia became a predominately African American neighborhood, marking a period of social unrest especially with the desegregation of the public pool once located in the park.<sup>17</sup>

Today, Anacostia remains predominantly Black and poor. In fact, it is one of the poorest neighborhoods in the region with a median household income less than \$35,000, making Washington, DC one of the most segregated cities based on income inequality.<sup>18</sup> The occupation of the Bonus Army and the ensuing presence of the National Park Service is part of the story of the local community, yet the history of the park's development and its role in shaping the region goes uninterpreted. The park could benefit by exploring archives at the Historical Society of Washington, DC as the organization not only has

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<sup>17</sup> John Kelly, "Bathing Suits and Civil Rights: Integrating the District's Pools Was Not Easy," *Washington Post*, June 10, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Poon, "Mapping the Stark Rich-Poor Divide in Major U.S. Cities," CityLab (Dec 13, 2016), accessed November 29, 2019, <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2016/12/esri-map-income-inequality-washington-dc-new-york-san-francisco/510398/>.

copies of the *B.E.F. News* and collections of artifacts from participating veterans, but also primary and secondary sources on the development the Anacostia community throughout the twentieth century.

Interpretation on the Bonus Army could also be expanded to make connections to other social movements, particularly those taking place nearby on the National Mall. This is an understudied and significant connection that deserves further attention. During the civil right protests of the mid-twentieth century, reporters referenced the Bonus Army as a predecessor of some of the nation's most memorable acts of civil disobedience, including the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. A *Washington Post* article archived at the Historical Society of Washington, DC noted the similarities between the Bonus Army and the 1963 march. In July of 1963, Chalmers M. Roberts reported that King's March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was "no different from the mass sit-ins by organized labor in the 1930s...even the Bonus Army of 15,000 World War I veterans who came here in 1932 was, in very large measure, a product of the unemployed, a demand redress of grievances." Recalling the violent eviction of Bonus marchers, Roberts expressed concern that the impending March on Washington would end similarly.<sup>19</sup> Interpreters at Anacostia Park can also use the "Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites" (discussed in chapter 5) to contextualize the Bonus Army's connection to civil rights struggles more broadly. In addition to these resources, there are a number of other publications and statements archived in the local DC historical society (particularly in the manuscript collection 0738) that would provide

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<sup>19</sup> Chalmers M. Roberts, "'March' Could Prove Negro's Vindication," (July 21, 1963), *Washington Post*, Bonus Army MS 0738 Box 7, folder "Poor People's March," Historical Society of Washington, DC.

fodder for interpreters seeking to connect the Bous Army to other protests and social movement taking place in the capital over the twentieth century.

### **Recommendations for Interpreting the Legacy of the Poor People’s Campaign**

The National Mall and Memorial Parks (NAMA) differs from most parks (including Anacostia) in that these units primary focus on interpreting national history, such as the legacy of the presidents and major military conflicts. Technically the National Mall and Memorial Parks comprise a total of fourteen park units, including the Belmont-Paul Women’s Equality National Monument, Constitution Gardens, Ford’s Theatre National Historic Site, Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site, and the iconic memorials in the vicinity. While the National Capital Parks receive greater scrutiny due to their close geographical proximity to lawmakers, part of NAMA’s enabling legislation entails preserving the space “as a park for the recreation and pleasure of the people.”<sup>20</sup> The landscape’s accessibility for public protest is also protected by a ruling by the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit that recognized its historic role as a site for the expression First Amendment rights.<sup>21</sup> As such, the NPS must allow demonstrations under special conditions. In its foundation document, the National Mall also recognizes several key interpretive themes (the most important ideas of the site), including the park’s role in facilitating “a continuing dialogue.” The park embraces this theme by acknowledging that “it is here, America’s front yard, where people gather who

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<sup>20</sup> “Foundation Document: National Mall and Memorial Parks,” (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2007), [https://www.nps.gov/nama/learn/management/upload/NAMA\\_FD\\_SP2.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/nama/learn/management/upload/NAMA_FD_SP2.pdf); Friends of Vietnam Memorial v. Kennedy, 116 F.3d 495 (DC Cir. 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 55.

want to be heard and express their First Amendment right to demonstrate peacefully.” The Mall is the place where democracy occurs, and the park’s foundation document recognizes it as such, offering rangers an invitation to explore protests as part of their interpretive programming.<sup>22</sup>

According to the park’s foundation statement, staff are tasked with interpreting the history of the space itself, including the impact of the L’Enfant and McMillan plans as well as “the values or stories represented by commemorative works or sites.”<sup>23</sup> As “the stage for First Amendment demonstrations, national celebrations, and regional and local special events and activities,” the National Mall itself is symbolic of the exercise of free speech and the ability to collectively gather. There are, however, a number of units that are particularly emblematic of the struggle for equality, including the Belmont Paul House, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.<sup>24</sup> Interpreting this history gives rangers an opportunity to fulfil the park’s foundation document by talking about how protest is an inherent part of the Mall’s history and identity.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, the National Park Service as well as the other government agencies located on the Mall have expressed concern over preserving and protecting the terrain due to the high volume of visitors. In 2010, the NPS released a summary of its plans for protecting and rehabilitating the Mall in the coming decades. In addition to identifying natural and cultural resources in need of preservation, the plan also

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid ,19.

<sup>23</sup> “Foundation Statement for the National Mall and Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Park,” National Park Service, (2007), <https://www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan/Documents/National%20Mall%20Plan%20-%20Park%20Foundation%20Statement.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> “Purpose of and Need for the Plan: Draft National Mall Plan/environmental Impact Statement,” National Park Service, (2007), [https://www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan/Documents/DraftEIS/DEIS/3\\_Purpose\\_and\\_Need.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan/Documents/DraftEIS/DEIS/3_Purpose_and_Need.pdf).

recognized the landscape as a “democratic stage.” Accordingly, one of the National Park Service’s objective in the coming years was “to be able to accommodate huge numbers of people flexibly, efficiently, and sustainably.”<sup>25</sup> Preserving the landscape and the memorials was the plan’s main objective, yet it also addressed increasing access to educational content by creating new spaces for interpretive programming. For example, the plan proposed establishing a room in the NPS offices near the Delano Roosevelt Memorial specifically dedicated to education programming.<sup>26</sup> The plan also called for the construction of a visitor center at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to educate the public about the significance of the conflict.

Perhaps most relevant to the topic of this dissertation, the National Mall Plan Summary also called for greater connection between the core of the Mall (located between Constitution and Independence Avenues) and the memorials on the Tidal Basin through the installation of a series of walking paths. While technically part of the same landscape, these two sections of the Mall feel disjointed by a series of busy roads.<sup>27</sup> At the time of the report’s publication (2010), the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial was still under construction. In the proceeding years, a cross walk was added to Independence Avenue, allowing visitors to cross from the King Memorial to the south side of the Mall at the exact spot where Resurrection City once stood. Despite the historical significance

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<sup>25</sup> “National Mall Plan Summary: Enriching Our American Experience, Envisioning a New Future,” National Park Service, (2010), accessed 14, 2019, [https://www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan/Documents/FEIS/NAMA\\_Summary2010.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan/Documents/FEIS/NAMA_Summary2010.pdf), 7.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> There are two main thoroughways of Independence Avenue cutting off the core of the Mall from the Tidal Basin. Further east, Maine Avenue (one of the main roads connecting the southern portion of the city to Interstate 395) intersects Independence Avenue, resulting in a constant flow of traffic between the Tidal Basin parking lot and the Mall near the Washington Memorial.

of the national memorial to King being located only a few yards from where his final protest took place, there is no indication that the two landscapes are connected, nor is there evidence that a small city once occupied this spot on the Mall. To better connect these sites, the National Park Service could reference its plans from the National Mall Plan Summary to implement a series of paths that will better connect the King memorial with the rest of the Mall. As the Tidal Basin is separated by a busy through-way, having only one or two locations to cross from one section of the Mall to another is not ideal.

Interpretive rangers have discussed installing a wayside marker on the National Mall recognizing the presence of the Poor People's Campaign, yet they do not have the authority to make this decision (which would require a consensus from top officials at NAMA), and there are currently no official plans for such a project. But a physical memorial is necessary to commemorate the demonstration, particularly as the present-day landscape bears no traces of the small city that once stood on the grounds. After Resurrection City was dismantled, the National Park Service left this section largely undeveloped with the exception of the Korean War Veterans Memorial, authorized by an act of Congress in 1986.<sup>28</sup> Several public restrooms and U.S. Park Police horse stables (built in 1976), also occupy the southern section of where the city once stood.<sup>29</sup> The northern part of the landscape, located in between the Reflecting Pool and the District of

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<sup>28</sup> "An Act to authorize the erection of a memorial on Federal land in the District of Columbia and its environs to honor members of the Armed Forces of the United States who served in the Korean war," [H.R. 2205], Public Law 99-572, (Oct 28, 1986), 99<sup>th</sup> Congress, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-100/pdf/STATUTE-100-Pg3226.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> "Campaign to Rebuild the U.S. Park Police Horse Stables," The Trust for the National Mall, accessed November 16, 2019, <https://www.nationalmall.org/hordestables>.

Columbia War Memorial, is now the JFK Hockey Field where local sports clubs routinely practice.

A seemingly unremarkable section of the Mall in comparison with more popular areas around the national monuments, the grassy area on the South side of the Reflecting Pool is a pivotal landscape in the national story of racial and class struggle; it is a tangible reminder of what ordinary people sought to achieve by uniting in spite of their ethnicity or gender, a radical act at the time. There are over a dozen proposals for the additional of memorials to the National Mall, a number of which have only tangential connections to American history, yet the campaign is not in line for any type of commemoration. Some acknowledgement of the events that took place during the summer of 1968 is necessary to connect it with the other symbolic spaces in the larger landscape of the Mall. The former site of Resurrection City, located within five minutes walking distance of the Lincoln Memorial (where Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous speech in 1963), is located directly across the street from the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, offering a unique opportunity to create a meaningful but brief interpretive program about the Civil Rights Movement and its trajectory over the course of the 1960s. As interpretive rangers are often limited to 15- or 20-minute tours, taking visitors from the Lincoln Memorial to the site of Resurrection City, culminating at the King Memorial is a feasible program.

With the agency currently in the process of expanding the U.S. Park Police horse stables into a larger facility, the National Park Service has an opportunity to reconsider its interpretation of this space to incorporate the Poor People's Campaign as a permanent part of its interpretive plan. A public presentation made in April of 2019 suggested that the redevelopment project "could provide the public with educational and interpretive

exhibits,” yet the presentation did not specify the form or content of the interpretation.<sup>30</sup> An NPS press release from July 2019 later revealed that new facilities would “allow for the public to learn about the Park Police and the horse mounted unit.”<sup>31</sup> The redevelopment of the site as “a new principal destination on the National Mall and an integral part of the visitor experience” is problematic, particularly as there is no tangible acknowledgement of the campaign.<sup>32</sup> Creating educational and interpretive programming about the USPP (the police force tasked with keeping order surrounding the grounds of Resurrection City during the summer of 1968) reinforces the hierarchical structures that sought to quell the protests fifty years ago, allowing the police to control the narrative in that space.

The NPS is currently working on a long-range interpretive plan for the Mall, which has not yet been released to the public for comment. Once the document has been made public in the coming months, it will be available on the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website. This plan “envisions the next ten years of interpretation and educational services at NAMA.” According to the NPS, the agency will be seeking public comment on this interpretive plan, which will be a critical in encouraging the agency to address some of the untold stories, including the Poor People’s Campaign.

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<sup>30</sup> “Public Scoping Documents,” Planning, Environment, and Public Comment, National Park Service, (April 17, 2019), accessed November 15, 2019, <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=427&projectID=81666&documentID=94281>

<sup>31</sup> “Proposed Redevelopment of the U.S. Park Police Stables,” National Park Service News Release, (July 23, 2019), accessed November 15, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/nama/learn/news/proposed-redevelopment-of-the-u-s-park-police-stables.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> “Campaign to Rebuild the U.S. Park Police Horse Stables,” The Trust for the National Mall, accessed November 16, 2019, <https://www.nationalmall.org/hordestables>.

As a nationally significant space, the National Mall's connection to the local community is often forgotten. But it was local support that facilitated the establishment of Resurrection City, with the Black residents of Washington, DC bearing the brunt of police brutality in the months after the destruction of the shantytown.<sup>33</sup> To better bridge the connection between the national and local significance of the Mall, interpreters have a number of resources at their disposal, including NPS theme studies. The main purpose of these resources is to help professionals and members of the public identify and nominate historically significance properties as National Historic Landmarks, but theme studies also support parks by "provid[ing] a national historic context for specific topics in American history or prehistory." Recent publications include studies on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) history, the Reconstruction Era (2017), and Asian American and Pacific Islander history (2018).<sup>34</sup> Conducted by scholars in the field, theme studies are invaluable resources that connect broad themes in American history to place. While these resources ae intended to prompt the designation of new National Historic Landmarks, parks can also benefit by using the research to enhance their interpretation. Scholars have also called for additional theme studies to increase the number of landmarks dedicated to the places of marginalized Americans.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Lauren Pearlman, "More than a March: The Poor People's Campaign in the District," *Washington History* 26, no. 2 (Fall 2014), pp. 24-41.

<sup>34</sup> "Theme Studies," National Historic Landmarks, National Park Service, accessed November 17, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/theme-studies.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> For example, disability historian Perri Meldon recently completed her Master's thesis about the National Park Service's interpretation of disability history. As a result of her findings, she recommended that the NPS commission a study on the places associated with disability history to guide units in their interpretation.

Several theme studies have the potential to inform and enhance interpretation on the topic of protests in the District of Columbia, including *Civil Rights in America: Racial Desegregation of Public Accommodations* (2004, revised 2009) and *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* (2004, revised 2008). Produced in collaboration between the Organization of American Historians and the National Park Service, *A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites* centers on the significance of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and explores the struggle for equality on the landscape dating from 1776 to 1976. This resource focuses predominately on the Black Civil Rights Movement, but it also provides context on civil rights more broadly, featuring research on the women's suffrage movement, the Chicano Movement, and the American Indian Movement. It makes connections between civil rights struggles, particularly those of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, yet it omits one of the key catalysts: the Poor People's Campaign. The theme study is particularly relevant to interpreters on the Mall and it details Marion Anderson's concert held in 1939 at the Lincoln Memorial as well as the 1963 March on Washington. Covering the Black Civil Rights Movement up through 1964, it omits reference to King's later advocacy and work, yet the framework is still relevant as it contextualizes how to interpret the history of civil rights in America.

Interpreters on the Mall can use this resource to identify correlations between movements and suggest how they inform each other, framing the 1968 campaign as a unifying event that sought collaboration between Black, Latino/a, Native American, and white activists. Rangers stationed on the National Mall have the freedom to interpret American history broadly, and while a select number of them focus on some aspects of civil rights history (namely the 1963 march), many protests, marches, and demonstrations

go unrecognized. The Poor People's Campaign can be used as a starting point to initiate a dialog with visitors about how protest shaped and continue to influence our democracy.

While the National Park Service currently offers a number of theme studies connected to themes of protest, it would be beneficial to have a theme study on social movements (with an emphasis on the twentieth century). Such a document would compliment the civil rights theme study without being redundant. A study on the topic his would not only help identify historic properties eligible for listing to the National Register of Historical Places or designation as National Historic Landmarks, it would encourage parks to better connect themes at their site with other units across the country. For many movements, the physical act of travel was a key element of protest; for example, the journey to Washington, DC was a symbolic element of the Bonus Army march and Poor People's Campaign. Other movements also employed similar tactics, as demonstrated by the women's suffrage movement's Prison Special and the Red Power Movement's Longest Walk.<sup>36</sup> Sites associated with these demonstrations, while spanning the continent, are directly connected as historical actors made intentional decisions about traveling from one place to another. While the place itself has meaning, so does the journey.

While interpreting these protests should be undertaken in parks, all NPS personnel should seek to support this work. The Washington Support Office (WASO) is the

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<sup>36</sup> After their imprisonment at the Occoquan Workhouse for picketing the White House, suffragists orchestrated a demonstration known as the Prison Special. To protest the brutal treatment they received (beatings and force-feeding), the women organized a train tour across the country. They made garments resembling prison garb and spoke to crowds about their imprisonment and the importance of women's suffrage. Catherine H. Palczewski, "The 1919 Prison Special: Constitution White Women's Citizenship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 102, no. 2 (2016): 107-132.

national headquarters located in Washington, DC and it serves as the home of many NPS programs, including the Partnerships and Civic Engagement Directorate, the Interpretation, Education, and Volunteers Directorate, and the Cultural Resources, Partnerships, and Science Directorate. A number of programs operate under these three directorates, including the Archeology Program, Park History Program, Tribal Relations and American Cultures Program, and Cultural Resources Office of Interpretation and Education. While WASO is technically based in Washington, DC, its offices and personnel support the mission of parks all across the country. Due to their close proximity to the National Capital Parks, staff have unique opportunities to connect with local units. However, many of the archaeologists, historians, and preservationists do not physically visit the parks in the vicinity. While some personnel travel and check in on parks, there should be more interaction between the staff at WASO and those in parks. By building networks of support with interpretive rangers working in Anacostia, on the National Mall, and in the numerous other sites throughout the region, subject matter experts come to better understand park needs. The exchange between field interpreters and content experts at WASO can also break down existing barriers between the disciplines, leading to more authentic working relationships. To dismantle the siloed park mentality, WASO personnel should be more willing to engage with those in the field.

As staff at Washington Support Office assist parks by creating interpretive guides, educational resources, and digital content, their proximity to some of the largest research institutions such as the Library of Congress, National Archives, and Smithsonian Institute affords them the opportunity to conduct the research that parks may not have access to. As one of the biggest challenges in the National Park Service is connecting the story of

parks in the local context to the broader national story of American history, the staff at WASO could provide valuable assistance in achieving this local-national connection by conducting research in the capital. These institutions also have records on both the Poor People's Campaign and Bonus Army, and while it is unrealistic to expect an interpretive ranger to make trips to these institutions to conduct research to support a fifteen minute program (there is simply a lack of time to do this), this is a project that a summer intern or fellow could take on.

Most NPS staff struggle to complete their workload and as many positions have been left unfilled during the current presidential administration, personnel often accept details to fill in for empty positions. Lack of capacity is an ongoing struggle, yet there are a number of internship programs for college undergraduate and graduate students that benefit both students and the NPS by engaging students in projects with parks and programs. The NPS could arrange with one of its internship programs such as the National Council for Preservation Education or the Cultural Resources Diversity Internship program to hire an intern with a historical background to conduct research at the capital's many research institutions. This is an opportunity for students to gain valuable archival experience while providing the NPS with knowledge about local and national history that could support park interpretation or digital content.

As noted in the previous chapter, the National Park Service began to critically assess its role in how it presented historical knowledge to the public in the last decade of the twentieth century. Since then, the agency has expanded the scope of the stories it incorporates into its exhibits, wayside markers, and ranger programs. The National Park Service has made notable strides in including a broader spectrum of American stories in

its parks and programs. In the wake this progress, however, a number of parties have noted the need for NPS to recognize its own role in shaping American history, specifically its responsibility in acquiring public land (often displacing existing communities) and in shaping land management policies. How should the federal agency interpret the history it helped shape? Can the NPS interpret its (sometimes controversial) past in an unbiased way? As the government agency responsible for the care and maintenance of America's most significant public spaces, NPS was a major player in advocating for policies and legislation that furthered its mission.<sup>37</sup> While scholars have written about the NPS's influence on the preservation movement, little literature exists on why the NPS acquired certain properties and how it made decisions to manage those lands in terms of public accessibility. While addressing the lack of diversity in official parks and programs, the NPS has been slower to confront its own role in influencing the history of the natural and cultural resources in its care. Historians and interpreters both inside and outside of the NPS have encouraged this line of inquiry and new knowledge is emerging about the NPS's relationship with the public.<sup>38</sup>

This dissertation acknowledges the progress the National Park Service has made in the past several decades in establishing interpretive best practices and encouraging the exploration of inclusive histories while identifying areas that need improvement. The NPS is beginning to examine its own role in shaping the landscapes of its units, allowing

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<sup>37</sup> NPS Chief Historian Verne Chatelain, for example, was instrumental in drafting the Historic Sites Act of 1935. Using his position within the agency, he helped draft legislation that shaped the practice of preservation for the next century. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., "Verne E. Chatelain and the Development of the Branch of History of the National Park Service," *The Public Historian* 16, no. 1 (Winter, 1994): 24-38.

<sup>38</sup> Rebecca Conard, "The Changing Face of the Country: Environmental History and the Legacy of the Civil War at Stones River National Battlefield," *The George Wright Forum Environmental History in National Parks* 28, no. 2 (2011): 161-181, 170-171.

the agency to engage with the communities associated with these sites. To authentically engage in conversations about contested histories, including the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign demonstrations, the National Park Service should increase its interpretive offerings through education programs, guided tours, museum exhibits, and historical wayside markers. The agency should also thoroughly document and record all programs it offers. As is the case for most park interpretation, the programs on the Bonus Army and Poor People's Campaign were not recorded – there is no formal script or video documenting the program to use to train other interpreters, making replicating these programs even more challenging, especially as content experts retire or leave the agency. The protests also need to be contextualized in the broader narrative of American history. Despite isolated attempts to bring greater awareness to these two demonstrations, more should be done to frame these acts of civil disobedience in context to national historical themes to underscore the importance of social movements in informing historical trends and shifting cultural paradigms.

While many people are involved in supporting the interpretive mission of the NPS, it is the front line interpreters, the underpaid and often underappreciated members of the agency, that visitors encounter while at a National Park or National Historic Site. As these interpreters serve as the face of the National Park Service, investing in further education and training for these people is a critical part of the agency fulfilling its promise to the public. Interpretation is the tool the NPS uses to help visitors connect more deeply to a park and its resources in order to inspire better citizens and stewards. Supporting interpretive practice is, by extension, a key way the agency secures its own

relevancy and succeeds in its mission to protect the nation's most significant natural and cultural treasures.

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National Park Service, National Capital Region Papers, Record Group 79

Historical Society of Washington, D.C.'s Kiplinger Research Library

Bonus Army Research Collection, 1919–1947, Record Group 0738

### Digital Collections

Cities and Towns Map Collection, Library of Congress,

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/cities-and-towns/>

Public Policy Topics Web Archive, Library of Congress,

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/public-policy-topics-web-archive/>

### Selected Newspapers

- AV** *The American Veteran.*  
**ADT** *Ames Daily Tribune*  
**BS** *Baltimore Sun*  
**BEF** *The Bonus Expeditionary Forces*  
**BDE** *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*  
**CL** *Clarion-Ledger*  
**CT** *The Columbus Telegram*  
**CSW** *Corsicana Semi-Weekly*  
**DC** *The Daily Courier*  
**DNI** *Daily National Intelligencer*  
**DN** *The Daily News*  
**DR** *The Daily Republic*  
**DDH** *Delphos Daily Herald*  
**EPT** *El Paso Times*  
**EC** *Evening Courier*  
**EN** *The Evening News*  
**IS** *The Indianapolis Star*  
**LPT** *Logansport Pharos-Tribune*  
**NYT** *The New York Times*  
**OT** *Oakland Tribune*  
**PI** *The Philadelphia Inquirer*  
**PP** *Pittsburg Press*

**RT** *Reading Times*  
*The Slingonian*  
**SND** *Shamokin News-Dispatch*  
**SND** *Southern Illinoisan*  
**WP** *The Washington Post*

### **Interviews (Conducted in Person by Author)**

Paul Ollig, Washington, D.C., May 15, 2019.

Kerry Olson, Washington, D.C., July 11, 2019.

Susan Philpott, Washington, D.C., August 13, 2019.

John Rudy, Harper's Ferry, WV, May 24, 2019.

Vince Vaise, Washington, D.C., May 6, 2019.

Julia Washburn, Washington, D.C., May 21, 2019.

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