# PUBLIC HISTORY AND THE FRACTURED PAST: COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG, THE USABLE PAST, AND THE CONCEPT OF AN AMERICAN IDENTTIY

By

Elaura Highfield

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Dr. Susan Myers-Shirk, Chair

Dr. Rebecca Conard

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## ABSTRACT

Colonial Williamsburg's educators have used the past to create a historical context around the colonial city and to construct an American history and identity. I study Colonial Williamsburg's publications to explore how the site defined early Americans and how this definition changed over time. From the site's inception in the 1920s and 1930s until the 1960s, Colonial Williamsburg's educators used the past to create a homogenous American identity that favored the white and wealthy. The social history movement of the 1960s and 1970s, along with newly hired interpreters and academic pressure to accommodate new standards, challenged Colonial Williamsburg to alter its usable past to form a more inclusive American identity. Along with studying the changes in the site's public depiction of an American, I also research how Colonial Williamsburg's American identity interacted with historical diversity and conflict.

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# CHAPTER I

## THE USABLE PAST, SOCIAL HISTORY, AND PUBLIC HISTORY

Since its inception in the early twentieth century, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has offered a usable past to its audiences. The usable past is not inherently diverse or inclusive, so public history sites have sometimes used the past to create narrow, biased histories. Colonial Williamsburg initially offered a homogenous usable past because the site promoted an American history that told the story of the white and wealthy planter elite. The social history movement, along with newly hired interpreters and educators in the 1970s, challenged the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation to develop a more diverse usable past and American identity. Colonial Williamsburg's usable past eventually grew more inclusive and incorporated historical diversity and conflict. I argue that in the 1970s, Colonial Williamsburg's public image of an American expanded to include a variety of lived experiences and incorporated African Americans, children, the mentally ill, and the poorer classes.

In chapters two and three, I examine those changes by studying how Colonial Williamsburg deployed a usable past to create a specific image for public consumption of what it meant to be an American. In chapter one, I define the usable past, provide a brief background of early public history and its development into a profession, and explain how social history altered academic and public history. This chapter argues that public history relies on a usable past because audiences gain knowledge and context from visiting a historical site. I also argue that Colonial Williamsburg educators engaged in public history work from the site's origins. For instance, Colonial Williamsburg

consistently used the past to educate audiences and create an American identity. This act of conveying historical information and interpretations to the public constitutes public history. In the 1970s and 1980s, Colonial Williamsburg's application of the usable past as well as its definition of an American identity shifted in response to research from social historians and pressure to incorporate new academic standards. In the same generation, public history also professionalized. Like social history, professional public history focuses on diverse audiences and historical experiences. After the 1980s, professional public history influenced Colonial Williamsburg, but it is difficult to gauge how professional public history affected Colonial Williamsburg as a public history site. In contrast, it is easier to determine how social history affected Colonial Williamsburg's usable past and public construction of an American through the site's hiring decisions and externally published documents.

The usable past has three primary functions: to provide meaning to individuals and groups, to apply past experiences to current problems, and to create historical context for the present. The usable past provides meaning to the present through the formation of values and personal and group identities. To study how people connect to and use the past, historians David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig interviewed over 800 Americans in a 1994 survey. In 1998, Rosenzweig and Thelen published their research in *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life.*[1] The authors defined the usable past in the context of how Americans' relate to and explain the past and how they use it to reinforce personal connections. Rosenzweig recorded that respondents felt "most

[1] Roy Rosenzweig and David P. Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

connected when they encountered the past with the people who mattered most to them, and they often pursued the past in ways that drew in family and friends."[2] Audiences understood the past on a personal basis and attached meaning to history through associating it with valuable people. Recent audience studies such as that conducted by Thelen and Rosenzweig demonstrate the importance of individual history-making and the role of the usable past for popular audiences. The usable past also has practical application. People adapt to the present in relation to what they have learned from the past. For example, the usable past teaches people not to touch hot stoves. The usable past also conveys context. Along with creating meaning and providing practical application, the usable past creates an environment where current events can be understood in the context of past events. Colonial Williamsburg has also used the past to create an American identity that has affected how visitors have understood American history and their place in the story.

Published in *The Dial* in 1918, Van Wyck Brooks' "On Creating a Usable Past," contains one of the earliest references to the usable past.[3] Literary critic and Progressive era historian, Brooks argued that American intellectuals had to contend with a "gloss upon the past that renders it sterile for the living mind."[4] He claimed that American histories lacked creativity and practical application, complaining that the "present is a void, and the American writer floats in that void because the past that survives in the

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[2] Roy Rosenzweig, "How Americans Use and Think about the Past: Implications from a National Survey for the Teaching of History," in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, eds. Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixzas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 265.

[3] Van Wyck Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," *The Dial*, April 11, 1918.

[4] Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," 338.

common mind of the present is a past without living value."[5] The solution, Brooks contended, was to ask ourselves a question: "What is important for us?" Brooks argued that "the more personally we answer this question ... the more likely we are to get a vital order out of the anarchy of the present."[6] Brooks encouraged a personal and pragmatic connection to the past. Brooks' usable past reflects some of the ideals of Progressive history and education.

Progressive educators' use of the past sometimes foreshadowed later public historians' use of the past, since the two groups intended to make history accessible and applicable. Progressive educators endeavored to create a more democratic, educated public and used the past to promote this agenda. Progressives emphasized active learning, valued "personal meaning making," and viewed education as a "socio-political activity with a goal of improving society."[7] Their concepts of active learning and the role of the individual in education translate well to the twenty-first century current issues in public history. Public historians recognize the role of audiences' personal interpretations and how this affects what and how they learn. Progressive educators relied on a usable past to provide meaning and to act as a vehicle for social improvement. Likewise, public historians occasionally follow this example as they contextualize the present and address current issues.

The academic and social contributions of John Cotton Dana and John Dewey illustrate how early public historians and educators used the past to edify audiences and enrich their lived experiences. Dana founded the Newark Museum and pushed for greater

[5] Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," 339.
[6] Brooks, "On Creating a Usable Past," 340.
[7] George E. Hein, "The Role of Museums in Society: Education and Social Action," *Curator* 48, no. 4 (October 2005): 361-362.

accessibility for public education, literacy, and admission to museums and libraries. In his 1920, *A Plan for a New Museum*, Dana claimed that museums "must fight for…the making of such collections, and the construction of such buildings, and the employment of such persons of skill" that lead museum staff to work "together for the pleasure, the education and the profit of their respective communities."[8] Dana addressed the usable past by showing how museums and public history sites can benefit their audiences and especially their communities through education. As a Progressive educator, John Dewey perceived education as more than a pedagogic mission and associated the usable past with the moral responsibility to improve teachers and students' access to education and to instruct them on how to act as democratic citizens.[9] As an expert on both John Dewey and museum education, the historian George E. Hein has stressed that Dewey's "faith in democracy and his moral philosophy require that the value of an educational activity depends on its social consequences as well as its intellectual content."[10] Although not all public historians agree with the precepts of Progressive education, most historians recognize history's capacity to serve as a vehicle for social change. Like Progressive educators, public historians, with their emphasis on public education, use the past for social instruction.

Like John Cotton Dana and John Dewey, the academic historian Carl Becker also argued for history's usefulness. Becker promoted "New History" and history's relativity, as evinced by his 1932 American Historical Association presidential address "Everyman

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[8] John Cotton Dana, *A Plan for a New Museum: The Kind of Museum it will Profit a City to Maintain* (Woodstock, Vermont: The Elm Tree Press, 1920), 10.

[9] George E. Hein, "Progressive Museum Education: Examples from the 1960s," *International Journal of Progressive Education* 9, no. 2 (November 2013): 62.

[10] George E. Hein, "John Dewey's "Wholly Original Philosophy" and its Significance for Museums," *Curator* 49, no. 2 (April 2006): 181.

His Own Historian." Becker provided insight into history's meaning and application by arguing that every person is a historian of his or her own life and that audiences best relate to the past that is most useful. Becker reduced the definition of history to the phrase: "history is the memory of things said and done."[11] Becker established that memory is central to the past and that history serves a purpose through its connection to memory. People use memory pragmatically on a daily basis and abstractly in their construction of the past.

Becker's understanding of the usable past and its practical applications has remained relevant for historians. In the 1950s, historian Conyers Read studied Becker's essay and stressed that history's application is what made it valuable to Mr. Everyman. Read argued that part of Becker's definition of history and his parable of Mr. Everyman revealed that "the day-by-day actions of every man are based upon his knowledge of the past and his application of that knowledge to his present behavior and his future plans."[12] Becker believed history was beneficial in its capacity to help people make informed decisions based on experience. Read encouraged this use when he argued that "what we mean by wisdom as distinct from learning is the ability to apply past experience to present problems."[13] Becker's definition of history is useful for its relationship to audiences and its application in daily life, especially since people make decisions based on previous occurrences. Becker's emphasis on the individual and the role of memory in relation to past experiences teaches historians that audiences are already working as

[11] Carl Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian," *The American Historical Review* 37, no. 2 (January 1932): 223.

[12] Conyers Read, "The Social Responsibilities of the Historian," *The American Historical Review* 55, no. 2 (January 1950): 278.

[13] Read, "The Social Responsibilities," 278.

historians of their own lives and that the usable past in this context does not alienate public audiences from academic methods. Instead, these two approaches to the past give us insight into how the past is constructed and used by audiences. The public's personal uses of the past are motivated by pragmatism.[14] Similarly, academic and public historians use the past for individual meaning-making, but their use encompasses the construction and dissemination of historical scholarship. Still, all audiences scrutinize the past as a means to contextualize their current situation, making the application and methodology similar.

Roger D. Launius' 2013 article, "Public History Wars, the "One Nation/One People" Consensus, and the Continuing Search for a Usable Past," proved that the concept of a usable past is applicable to current political and social issues. Launius examined how historic sites employ the usable past to promote consensus history and avoid portraying historical diversity and conflict. As chief historian for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Launius studied how historians at historic sites and museums interpret Americans as homogenous and disregard diversity. He concluded, however, that history should be complex if it is to apply to a culturally diverse audience. Launius cited Van Wyck Brooks' essay and claimed that Brooks' "comments are still germane as we seek to apprehend an American history that is complex and conflicted rather than heroic and homogenized."[15] Lastly, Launius associated the usable past with history's ability to communicate values, identities, and historical significance to public audiences. Launius' article connected the usable past to the twenty-first century and

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[14] Read, "The Social Responsibilities," 278.

[15] Roger D. Launius, "Public History Wars, the "One Nation/One People" Consensus, and the Continuing Search for a Usable Past," *OAH Magazine Of History*, January 2013, 35-36.

argued for its capacity to create shared histories that are diverse.[16] Public historians create these shared histories, so their professional identity and uses of the past are significant when studying public history sites, like Colonial Williamsburg.

Public history has its roots in the professionalization of historians at the turn of the twentieth century, well before public historians developed a separate identity in the 1970s. The discipline of history solidified in the middle to late nineteenth century with the formation of professional associations such as the American Historical Association (1884) and the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (1907). As the discipline professionalized, the focus moved to the academy. Graduate programs for professional training in history were established at major American universities with some of the first graduate seminars in history being offered at institutions such as Harvard University and John Hopkins University. The career demographics of the early AHA members show that the majority were not confined to the academy. As Michael C. Scardaville noted in his article, "Looking Backward Toward the Future: An Assessment of the Public History Movement," "only one in four of the charter members had careers devoted primarily to university teaching."[17] For example, some AHA members collaborated with state and local historical societies and even invested their careers in these institutions. Historian Ronald J. Grele has argued that "prior to the emergence of public history, it was the local history movement which offered the most thoroughgoing alternative to the historical work done in the academy."[18] These precursors to the public historians of the 1970s

[16] Launius, "Public History Wars," 35-36.

[17] Michael C. Scardaville, "Looking Backward Toward the Future: An Assessment of the Public History Movement." *The Public Historian* 9, no. 4 (Autumn 1987): 37.

[18] Ronald J. Grele, "Whose Public? Whose History? What is the Goal of a Public Historian?" *The Public Historian* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 43. Among the earliest societies were the Massachusetts Historical

found employment in a variety of businesses and institutions, especially those connected with state and local history. In her monograph, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History*, Rebecca Conard viewed the life and career of Benjamin Shambaugh as a window onto early public history. [19] Shambaugh and his approach to applied history were influenced by New History, which encouraged historians to be intentional about preserving history and making it accessible to the public through archives and education. Shambaugh's definition of applied history included "collecting, preserving, publishing, and using history for the greater good of the state."[20] Shambaugh's involvement with the State Historical Society of Iowa and the creation of Iowa History Week embodied his commitment to applied history and his effort to disseminate historical understanding to the community.[21]

In addition, the roots of public history are evident in the work of America's early academic historians. Some historians anticipated the critical issues associated with the later public history movement. For instance, Lucy Maynard Salmon envisioned a broader understanding of history, especially in relation to sources, flexibility in interpretation, and the role of place. In a 1912 article, she argued that history is everywhere, even in a backyard.[22] Carl Becker's interest in history and memory, and his emphasis on their

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Society, founded in 1791, the Wisconsin Historical Society, founded in 1846, and the1892 American Jewish Historical Society, which claims the title of America's first ethnic society.

[19] For more information on how historians interacted with state and local historical societies in the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries, see Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[20] Rebecca Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 4.

[21] Conard, *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History*.

[22] Lucy Maynard Salmon, "History in a Back Yard (1912)," in *History and the Texture of Modern Life: Selected Essays*, eds. Lucy Maynard Salmon, Nicholas Adams, and Bonnie G. Smith (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

importance for "Mr. Everyman," are familiar themes for public historians. [23] Although Salmon and Becker were not the only academic historians to grapple with public history issues, their professional contributions demonstrate how academic historians assessed the public's relationship with the construction and dissemination of history.

Other scholars see the national park service as the true home and origin of public history. In *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (2012), Denise Meringolo has argued that American public history originated in the National Park Service instead of the 1970s with the social history movement and the field's professionalization. Meringolo located the origins of public history in the government's efforts to preserve America's past and in historians' employment in state and federal government positions. She asserted that the National Park Service, from its creation in 1916 into its development in the 1930s, transformed history into a "government job." With financial aid and support from the government, the National Park Service incorporated more historical and educational interpretation through its History Division. Meringolo's research and thesis provided innovative angles from which to view public history's definition and origin.[24]

Still other scholars argue that public history as a field resulted from academic historians becoming overly specialized and disengaged from their audience. Historian Michael C. Scardaville contended that the creation of the American Association of Museums (1906) and the Society of American Archivists (1936) were "established in the

[23] Carl Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian," *The American Historical Review* 37, no. 2 (January 1932): 221–236.

[24] Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

first half of the century in part as a reaction to a nonresponsive AHA."[25] He also asserted that these organizations existed "to meet the needs – through workshops, publications, and technical information – of the public side of history."[26] Academic history's specialization also possibly created a professional discontinuity between public and academic historians. In her essay, "Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition," Patricia Mooney-Melvin explained that "before the 1970s, graduates of traditional academic history programs working in public historical agencies sometimes experienced a sense of alienation from or found little welcome in the academically oriented professional historical associations."[27] She then acknowledged the creation of the Association of State and Local History in 1940 and argued that its constituents valued community-based history and formed a network of early public history professionals.[28]

Ian Tyrrell, in *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970*, claimed that early academic historians continued to attempt to work with and for public audiences and never disengaged. Among his many examples, he included Charles and Mary Beard's popular history book, *Rise of American Civilization* (1927) and Conyers Read and the American Historical Association's efforts with radio and television networks, such as the weekly radio periodical *The Story behind the Headlines.*[29] Tyrrell also maintained that academic historians were involved with public history. As examples, he offered New Deal initiatives and work that historians did for the government in the

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[25] Scardaville, "Looking Backward Toward the Future," 39.

[26] Scardaville, "Looking Backward Toward the Future," 39.

[27] Patricia Mooney-Melvin, "Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition," in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, ed. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia (Malabar, FL: Krieger Pub. Co., 1999), 29.

[28] Mooney-Melvin, "Professional Historians and the Challenge of Redefinition," 29.

[29] Ian Tyrrell, *Historians in Public: The Practice of American History, 1890-1970* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 100.

1940s. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal instituted programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration. The government also hired historians for the Federal Writer's Project and the Historic Records Survey. Echoing Meringolo's argument that located historians' employment in the federal government as the origination of public history, Tyrrell argued that historians engaged in public history work through governmental service, such as research, writing, analysis, and foreign translation. Many historians adjusted their skill sets to accommodate government work and research interests. For example, as a Southern historian who studied race and politics, C. Vann Woodward switched his focus to military history, particularly naval history. His popular history book *The Battle for Leyte Gulf: The Incredible Story of World War II's Largest Naval Battle* (1947) reached public audiences through Macmillan publishing.[30] Historians grew increasingly involved with government work in the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1960 and 1970s, historians reassessed this relationship and its effect on historical interpretation.

In the 1970s the social history movement challenged historians to think outside the lines of diplomatic, political, and military history that characterized the previous generation's research. Like New History and the early social history of the first half of the twentieth century that often pulled on themes of Populism, the social history movement of the 1970s expanded the themes of political, military, and intellectual history. However, the social history movement also altered academic and public history in its insistence on more inclusive, diverse history. Social history challenged the consensus history of the Cold War and responded to the changes associated with the civil

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[30] Tyrrell, *Historians in Public*, 191.

rights movement and disillusionment with authority Americans experienced as a result of the U.S. government's role in the Vietnam conflict. The historical context involved developments in African American history, the *Annales* School, Marxist history, women and gender studies, and quantitative history. Although many of these developments are associated with the 1970s, some originated in the 1960s and earlier generations. For example, African American histories such as C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crowe*, Kenneth Stamp's *The Peculiar Institution*, and Stanley Elkin's *Slavery* were published in the 1960s. The radical 1970s marked the maturing of ideas first expressed in the 1960s. However, W.E.B. DuBois' 1935 classic in Marxist historiography, *Black Reconstruction,* influenced Kenneth Stamp. Therefore, earlier generations of historians established the intellectual foundations of the social history movement, but the explosion of social history research occurred in the 1970s and proceeding years.

In *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory* historians Anna Green and Kathleen Troup examined the major theories in the historical profession. These theories also affected the social history movement and public history's professionalization. The *Annales* School encouraged American historians to reexamine their narratives and look to the big picture, the "total history." In 1929, French historians Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch founded this school with the publication of *Annales d'Histoire Economique et Sociale* and devised methodology for studying how environment, culture, society, and religion affect historical processes. [31] Ferdinand Braudel's *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1972)

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[31] Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

characterized this school. Marxist historians likewise challenged historians in the 1970s to expand their methodology and source base. Their engagement with labor consciousness and the role of economics provided new ways of viewing the working class. Edward P. Thompson's seminal *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) represented this theory. Studies in women's history, LGBT, and developments in quantitative history also revolutionized history in the 1970s. Research in women's history critiqued the concept of separate spheres and asked if all women are the same gender. With the technological advances of the 1960s, quantitative history created new sources and formats for applying large amounts of data to micro and macro scale analysis.

Social history reinterpreted historically marginalized groups, frequently using new techniques and methodological disciplines, such as oral history, as well as drawing from other disciplines including archaeology, anthropology, and material culture studies. Social history reexamined the question of who warrants historical interpretation. Social historians answered this by analyzing race, class, and gender. Social history created a usable past for audiences through forming interpretations that included historical conflict and diversity and showed how the mainstream, white-oriented history was flawed with omissions. Although social history did not create public history, the movement influenced both academic history and public history. The public history field is compatible with social history because many public historians adopted the methodologies of social history, such as oral history, cultural anthropology, and archaeology. These methodologies aid public historians in creating more diverse and inclusive historical narratives because of the multidisciplinary character of varied research. The relationship

between social history and public history is seen in public historians' employing the past to create usable narratives that incorporate cultural diversity and social conflict.

Historians in the 1970s found fewer university positions available, forcing many to broaden their understanding of the historical practice. Academically trained historians looked for work outside of the university and discovered it in existing public history institutions, such as museums, archives, and the government programs geared towards historical preservation and education. The job shortage did not extend to historians outside of the academy. During the 1970s, jobs in museums, archives, and local historical societies increased, especially those involved with America's bicentennial commemoration. Historian Michael C. Scardaville claimed that the academic job crisis encouraged public history as a "field new in name, not in practice, as the vehicle to broaden the vision and scope of academically oriented historians and organizations."[32] As more academic historians worked in the sphere of public history, the field gained credibility and acceptance.

Public history's professionalization occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s in conjunction with the social history movement and the job crisis. Historian Constance P. Schultz, in her essay "Becoming a Public Historian," discerned two origins to the public history movement: the creation of graduate public history courses to train students for history careers outside of the university and the developing professional identification of public historians.[33] Historian Robert Kelley coined the term "public history" in 1975 and, with G. Wesley Johnson, created the first public history graduate programs at the

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[32] Scardaville, "Looking Backward Toward the Future," 40.

[33] Constance P. Schultz, "Becoming a Public Historian," in *Public History: Essays from the Field*, ed. James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia (Malabar, FL: Krieger Pub. Co., 1999).

University of California, Santa Barbara. He served as its director from 1976-1977. During these years, like-minded historians acknowledged the need for training, professional standards, and a forum to communicate public history's practices and goals. Historians voted on the creation of the National Council on Public History in May of 1979 in the District of Columbia. The NCPH later adopted *The Public Historian,* which was created in 1978 and published by the University of California, Santa Barbara, as its journal in 1980. *The Public Historian* served as "a published and refereed literature on public history" and complimented the mission of the NCPH.[34]

The creation of the National Council on Public History in 1979 and the council's adoption of the journal *The Public Historian* in 1980 symbolized the beginning of a new subfield of history and challenged public historians to better incorporate professional standards and training in their work. By the early 1980s, the NCPH partially created parameters for what constituted public history through articles, books, and graduate training courses and programs. *The Public Historian* and the NCPH lent credibility to public history. This credibility helped distance the field from such misnomers as "alternative careers," which reduced the subfield's authority. Although the definition of public history was changing during its period of professionalization, most definitions described public historians as trained in the academic practices of research, analysis, and historical methodology. During these years, historian G. Wesley Johnson claimed that the

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[34] G. Wesley Johnson, "The Origins of 'The Public Historian' and the National Council on Public History," *The Public Historian* 21, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 176.

public history movement "began to change from a "cause" to an accepted part of the profession."[35]

The NCPH's mission statement and *The Public Historian's* website provide a professional definition of public history in their descriptions of the national organization and its printed scholarship. The NCPH mission statement asserts that the organization:

> inspires public engagement with the past and serves the needs of practitioners in putting history to work in the world by building community among historians, expanding professional skills and tools, fostering critical reflection on historical practice, and publicly advocating for history and historians.[36]

The statement uses strong action verbs to convey not only the practice of public history, but also its identity. The NCPH mission statement claims that the organization "inspires," "serves," and "fosters," useful connections between the past and audiences through the differing mediums of public history. Similarly, *The Public Historian's* website asserts that the journal is the "voice of the public history movement," and that it "emphasizes original research, fresh conceptualization, and new viewpoints." Also, the website claims that the journal's authors and publications "reflect the considerable diversity of approaches to the definition and practice of public history."[37] *The Public Historian* recognizes the complexity of assigning a specific definition to the field of public history.

The National Council on Public History and higher education programs in public history establish boundaries around the subfield and form professional standards. Professional training and ethics bolster public historians' authority in interpretation and in their public use of the past in environments where these historical interpretations and

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[35] Johnson, "The Origins of 'The Public Historian' and the National Council on Public History," 174.

[36] http://ncph.org/cms/about/ Access Date October 16, 2014

[37] http://ucpressjournals.com/journal.php?j=tph&jDetail=submit Access Date October 16, 2014

uses of the past are subjective. Since historians work with diverse audiences, individual interpretations of history are varied and frequently do not align with, or even challenge, public historians' interpretations. The Smithsonian's 1995 exhibit on the *Enola Gay* exemplified how history is open to multiple interpretations and how the past, especially the national past, carries social and cultural significance. In the mid-1990s, the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum struggled to interpret the *Enola Gay*, a B-29 superfortress bomber, and its mission to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, during World War II. Politicians and veteran groups publicly criticized the Smithsonian and demanded that the museum alter the content and tone of the exhibit to support the *Enola Gay's* mission, instead of questioning it and its success.[38] The National Air and Space Museum withdrew from its earliest interpretations, which incorporated the *Enola Gay's* Cold War legacy. Although the museum altered its exhibit, the past it interpreted still applied to audiences in regards to historical context and national identity. The national narrative that the Smithsonian constructed around the *Enola Gay* created a usable past because visitors could apply what they learned from the exhibit to their understanding of American history and World War II. Similar to how audiences form individualized interpretations of public events, like the *Enola Gay's* dropping of the atomic bomb, people also form various interpretations of public figures.

People can use the past to create multiple interpretations and historical narratives because of the controversial legacy of historical figures. It is difficult to interpret the Spanish conquistador Don Juan de Oñate because of his notorious relations with the Native Americans in the Southwest and his role in bringing Spanish culture to the area.

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[38] Edward Tabor Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1996).

Historian Alison Fields studied New Mexico's approach to interpreting and remembering Don Juan de Oñate during the state's Cuarto Centenario Celebration.[39] In her research towards this conflict-oriented past, she wanted to "identify forms of remembrance that resist forced resolution."[40] She argued that Albuquerque's commemoration revealed the unresolved conflict in the Mexican and Native American populations' memories of Don Juan Oñate. Many of the Spanish-American and Mexican-American groups appreciated Don Juan de Oñate's role in bringing Spanish culture to the region, while Native American groups concentrated on his brutal relations with the native inhabitants. As people approached this complex historical figure, they used the past to form narratives that applied to their understanding of history and its role in contextualizing the present. The Smithsonian's *Enola Gay* and New Mexico's Cuarto Centenario Celebration illustrate the complex environment in which Americans learn and construct history and in which public historians make the past applicable. These examples show that public historians often must maneuver between competing interpretations and uses of the past. However, public historians' professional identity is also connected to academic history because public historians use, disseminate, and share the past that academic historians construct.

The usable past forms a bridge between academic history and public history and is essential to public historians' professional identity. Academic historians conduct research and analyze historical events. Public historians disseminate historical information to audiences and form connections between audiences and academic history.

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[39] Alison Fields, "New Mexico's Cuarto Centenario: History in Visual Dialogue," *The Public Historian* 33, no.1 (Winter 2011): 44-72.

[40] Fields, "New Mexico's Cuarto Centenario," 45.

Importantly, public historians help audiences *use* the past through shared authority. Katharine Corbett's and Howard Miller's article, "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry," provides insight into how public historians use the past to connect audiences and historians. The authors researched how the reflective public history practice interacts with shared authority and manages the multiple interpretations made possible when working with and for the public. Corbett and Miller argued that "all good historical practice is reflective, but public history requires a special commitment to collaborate, to respond, to share both inquiry and authority."[41] They concluded by arguing that "like other keepers of the useful myths," public historians "are mediators between the past and the present, between the truths we want to tell and the truths people want to tell us."[42] The authors described how public historians share authority by working with audiences to construct a past that provides practical application and historical context.

Public history uses the past to provide meaning to individuals and groups, to apply past experiences to current problems, and to create historical context for the present. Since public historians work with audiences who already use the past for individual and group purposes, the usable past is controversial because history is open to personalized, often contradictory interpretations. These tensions in interpretation are intensified by national and group identities, like the veteran's issues with the Smithsonian's *Enola Gay* exhibit and the Native American's reservations with New Mexico's Cuarto Centenario Celebration for Don Juan de Oñate. Still, the usable past is valuable for its ability to encourage audiences to critically analyze interpretations, which

[41] Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. (Dick) Miller, "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry," *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2006):15.
[42] Corbett and Miller, "A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry," 38.

complicates American history. In chapter one, I defined a usable past, located possible origins for public history and sketched its professionalization, and explored social history's influence on academic history and public history. The research from chapter one provides background and relevance for the following chapters. Colonial Williamsburg, as a public history site, hired interpreters and educators who used the past to construct a specific American identity and history. In chapter two, I research how Colonial Williamsburg's publications used the past to create an American history and identity from the site's inception in the late 1920s until the 1960s. My research on social history for chapter one connects with chapter three, in which I study Colonial Williamsburg's construction of an American from the 1970s until recent years, and how the social history movement influenced the site and its educators. In the following two chapters, I show how Colonial Williamsburg used the past to create an American identity that failed to consistently incorporate historical diversity and conflict, but has made increasingly intentional efforts to form a holistic interpretation and American identity.

# CHAPTER II

## COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG, THE USABLE PAST, AND THE PUBLIC CONCEPTION OF AN AMERICAN IDENTITY, 1930-1960s

In chapter one, I examined the usable past and its relationship to academic and public history. In this chapter, I explore the implications of a usable past for Colonial Williamsburg. I argue that from the 1930s until the mid-1960s the site's financiers, planners, and interpreters avoided critical historical analysis and instead attempted to portray an American identity devoid of conflict and diversity. I organize my argument chronologically, using publications by and about Colonial Williamsburg. Over a period of fifty years, Colonial Williamsburg made the transition to incorporating a more inclusive usable past. Initially, however, Colonial Williamsburg's educators promoted a nostalgic, patriotic, and homogenous American history that depicted the white and wealthy planter elite, such as George Washington and George Wythe, as premier Americans. After 1970, however, their understanding of what it meant to be an American—and how they portrayed Americans at Colonial Williamsburg—changed fundamentally. Change at Colonial Williamsburg was a direct result of the social history movement. Social historians challenged the site's interpreters to incorporate historical diversity, conflict, and analysis into their definition of Americans.

Anders Greenspan's 2002 *Creating Colonial Williamsburg* and Richard Handler's and Eric Gable's 1997 *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* influenced my research and interpretations. Greenspan's *Creating Colonial Williamsburg* analyzed Colonial Williamsburg's inception and its

identity as a restored colonial city. Greenspan's research traced the history of Colonial Williamsburg as an institution, with special attention to cultural influences and shifts in leadership, especially between Rockefeller Jr. and his youngest son, Rockefeller III. Handler and Gable studied Colonial Williamsburg in the context of the social history movement and analyzed how successfully the interpretation adapted to include marginalized history. The authors paid special attention to how living history programs at the site supplemented or detracted from interpretation. My research builds on these two works by expanding the institutional history addressed by Greenspan to study Colonial Williamsburg's unique construction of an early American identity. I am indebted to Handler and Gable for their research on how Colonial Williamsburg interacted with diverse history in interpretations. Unlike Handler and Gable, I focus on the site's publications and public image, instead of studying the site's history, interpretation, and visitor experience.

As one of the largest outdoor living history museums and public history sites in America, Colonial Williamsburg attracts a diverse audience. Historically, Colonial Williamsburg's researchers and educators have focused on interpreting the historical context of colonial and revolutionary America, early American ideals, and the lived experiences of early Americans. From the beginning, site interpreters had a particular vision of American history and identity and conveyed this through interpretation, programs, and publications. Site educators and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation also promoted this conception to the public through its guidebooks, magazines, and staff

publications.[1] I analyzed these sources to evaluate how Colonial Williamsburg's educators determined who was an American and how this definition changed over time. I then examined how Colonial Williamsburg's interpreters related this altered definition to the inclusion of diversity, historical conflict, and greater historical analysis.

I connect diversity to conflict because Colonial Williamsburg educators associated the two. The site's educators rightly equated the inclusion of diverse people with the inclusion of historic struggle and inequality, which, in turn, implied an American past that was messier and less harmonious than they wanted to acknowledge. As a result, in the first decades of Colonial Williamsburg's existence, site educators often avoided portraying diversity so as to avoid discussing conflict in the early American experience. While I examine how Colonial Williamsburg used the past to create an early American identity beginning with the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in the late 1920s, I also argue that the site's interpreters eventually expanded the narrative in the 1970s to create a more complex understanding of American identity, especially with regard to interpreting the lower classes, African American history, and the history of colonial and early American slavery.[2] Colonial Williamsburg broadened its concept of an American identity which affected the site's public appearance as well.

I argue that Colonial Williamsburg's educators initially presented a conflict-free history and usable past because the site associated conflict with historical diversity. The site's original public image and the America it presented to the public were not historically accurate since Rockefeller Jr. recreated a colonial city that excluded slavery

[1] I examine Colonial Williamsburg's public image from externally published sources, with internal sources when necessary to provide context.

[2] John D. Rockefeller Jr. remained involved with Colonial Williamsburg, its restoration, and interpretation until his death in 1960.

and poverty. Rockefeller Jr. emphasized the architectural and aesthetic resources of the town, instead of researching the city's inhabitants and their lived experiences. In the 1950s and 1960s, Rockefeller III grew more involved with Colonial Williamsburg as his aging father's influence gradually receded. Rockefeller III envisioned Colonial Williamsburg as a center of knowledge about American origins and democracy. Under his leadership, the Foundation hired Edward Alexander, who served as the Director of Education and later as the Vice President of Interpretation. Although the site's public image during these years altered and expanded to a global audience, it did not incorporate diversity and conflict into the historical narrative. In the years following the 1970s, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation hired social historians who complicated the site's interpretation and included other Americans in addition to the planter elite. This shift in Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation and public image necessitated the analysis of historical discord, power struggles, and lived experiences, since including diversity rightly rewrote the nostalgic, nationalist history of earlier generations.

To make my case, I have examined the literature produced by Colonial Williamsburg for general audiences, scholars, and visitors. My sources included guidebooks, staff publications, presidential addresses, annual reports, the *Colonial Williamsburg Journal*, and reviews of Colonial Williamsburg from popular sources, such as home and garden magazines, but also from professional critics, such as the architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable. The guidebooks are useful both for what they include and what they omit. In 1957, Edward P. Alexander, Colonial Williamsburg's Vice President for Interpretation for nearly thirty years, acknowledged the value of the guidebooks. He noted that they fit the budgets of most visitors and "constitute a continuing link of visitors

with Williamsburg."[3] Alexander also asserted that the guidebooks would "be read carefully during and after the visit" and act as "a permanent Williamsburg ambassador in the visitor's library."[4] Alexander described the guidebook as a source of information about the site's interpretation and public image. In short, the guidebooks give a good indication of how Colonial Williamsburg educators and interpreters viewed their mission. Specifically, by studying how the material changed over time, it is possible to see how the definition of an American altered at Colonial Williamsburg.

Colonial Williamsburg presents a viable case study because of its architectural restoration, which has made it model for other historic sites, although not always in a good way. In her 1997 book *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion,* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable criticized Colonial Williamsburg's architectural interpretation. In her chapter, "The Way It Never Was," she asserted that "it was in the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg that the studious fudging of facts received its scholarly imprimatur, and that history and place as themed artifact hit the big time."[5] Colonial Williamsburg's restoration secured the site's position as cultural icon of architectural and historical interpretation. Huxtable added that Colonial Williamsburg attempted to incorporate evolving scholarship, but with limited success. She partially blamed the site's original mission for its failure to adapt: "it is the Williamsburg image and example as originally conceived that has spread and multiplied, that continues to be

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[3] Edward P. Alexander, *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1957), 21.

[4] Alexander, *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg*, 21.

[5] Ada Louise Huxtable, *The Unreal America: Architecture and Illusion* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 15.

universally admired and emulated."[6] I agree with Huxtable's assertion that Colonial Williamsburg's original usable past and mission has exerted a powerful influence over the site, its interpretation, and its public perception. I also agree that this image largely controlled the site's identity. However, I complicate this argument by showing how the evolving leadership at Colonial Williamsburg altered the site's description of early Americans and later included historical diversity and conflict.

Colonial Williamsburg serves as a valuable case study because of its cultural and symbolic significance.[7] Rockefeller Jr. and William Archer Rutherfoord Goodwin, the men responsible for the site's preservation, restored the colonial city because they recognized the value and interpretive potential of this historic area. Colonial Williamsburg retained its symbolic value; in 1957, Edward P. Alexander aligned Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation with history that "furnishes inspiration and encouragement to become better citizens."[8] Colonial Williamsburg also acts as a cultural representation of American origins and ideals. W.A.R. Goodwin addressed this in 1937 when he argued that Colonial Williamsburg, as the wealthiest, most powerful, and populous colonial city, represented all the colonies. He even argued that Williamsburg better reflected early America than Philadelphia or Boston.[9] Colonial Williamsburg's symbolic significance, visualized by its planners, affected the site's usable past and its public perception.

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[6] Huxtable, *The Unreal America*, 15.

[7] The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation consistently promoted this significance by insisting on its authenticity and authority as a historic site. For more information on how Colonial Williamsburg maintained and groomed its public image, see, Meghan Fall, "Searching for "Iconic": How Colonial Williamsburg Captures the Perfect Photograph," Master's Thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2012.

[8] Alexander, *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg*, 5.

[9] W.A.R. Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," *National Geographic Magazine*, April 1937, 402.

Lastly, Colonial Williamsburg works as a case study because of the way its staff chose to deploy the usable past. Although all museums depend on the past's applicability to provide historical context and meaning to both groups and individuals, Colonial Williamsburg's reputation, historical significance, and visitation statistics made it unique. Kenneth Chorley's 1949 *Colonial Williamsburg: Its Gardens and Buildings* clearly illustrates that Colonial Williamsburg's staff and educators recognized the site's potential as a public history site that depended on the usable past. In the book's foreword, Chorley, former Colonial Williamsburg Foundation president, argued that "the value of history lies in the perspective it gives us as we take up the problems of the present."[10] Chorley asserted that the value of the past, be it colonial America or not, is seated in its use to the present. As a public history site, Colonial Williamsburg's educators and people of authority, like Chorley, understood their dependence on the usable past, even when they did not express it in those terms. Chorley further argued that in reference to Colonial Williamsburg, "there is no better way for the modern American, man, woman, or child, to get a real emotional sense of the depth of his roots and the meaning of our nation's past."[11] Chorley also depicted Colonial Williamsburg as a preeminent location for visitors to get the most from the past in regards to understanding their nation and historical context. In his imaginings, American history was positive and applicable.

A brief history of Williamsburg partially explains why Colonial Williamsburg's leaders, like Chorley, were so enthusiastic about the site. Williamsburg's history also makes clear the site's later significance as a restored and reconstructed colonial city.

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[10] A. Lawrence Kocher and Howard Dearstyne, *Colonial Williamsburg, Its Buildings and Gardens: A Descriptive Tour of the Restored Capital of the British Colony of Virginia* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1949), v.

[11] Kocher and Dearstyne, *Colonial Williamsburg, Its Buildings and Gardens*, v.

After Jamestown, Williamsburg became the second capital of Virginia. Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson both served as Virginia governors in Williamsburg. Well known landmarks in Williamsburg include the College of William and Mary and Bruton Parish Church. Three American presidents, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, and John Tyler, attended the College of William and Mary. Many early American politicians and prominent figures were connected to Williamsburg, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and George Wythe. Overall, the town constituted a hub of activity in Virginia. However, the capital moved to Richmond in 1780 and Williamsburg lost its social and political prestige. Williamsburg did not experience the intense industrialization and urbanization that changed other colonial centers such as Boston and Philadelphia

Historians generally credit William Archer Rutherfoord Goodwin for first envisioning Colonial Williamsburg's restoration as a historic site in the 1920s.[12] Goodwin worked as a professor at William and Mary and also served as an Episcopal priest and as rector at Bruton Parish Church. Goodwin initially presented his ideas for restoration to Henry Ford, but later turned his attention to the philanthropist John D. Rockefeller Jr. when Ford declined. Goodwin described the city before the restoration as "sleepy, but charming." He dramatically asked in his 1938 personal memories, "who will care to live in bustling Richmond or New York when he can dwell in the everlasting

[12] For more information on the restoration and recreation of Colonial Williamsburg, see Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg: The Restoration of Virginia's Colonial Capital* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Park S. Rouse Jr., *Remembering Williamsburg: A Sentimental Journey through Three Centuries* (Richmond, VA.: Dietz Press, 1989) and Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

Sabbaths of Lotusburg?"[13] Goodwin praised the town for its isolation from industrialization and urbanization, comparing its inhabitants to the *Odyssey's* Lotus eaters. In Goodwin's view, Williamsburg's lack of major growth, in comparison to Boston, Philadelphia, and especially New York City, provided an opportunity to recreate a colonial city.[14]

In 1925 Rockefeller Jr. visited Williamsburg. He returned the following year and drafted plans to restore the Wren Building at William and Mary. The Wren Building attracted Rockefeller Jr. because of its historical and architectural significance. It constitutes one of the three buildings of the Ancient Campus at Williams and Mary and was the primary location for the college's classes and dorms. During the years of 1926 and 1927, Rockefeller Jr. expanded his interests and worked with Goodwin to plan the city's preservation and restoration. Goodwin's determination to restore Williamsburg, coupled with Rockefeller's finances and passion for architectural preservation, made Colonial Williamsburg a reality.

Goodwin calculated that the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation oversaw the destruction of over 459 of Williamsburg's modern buildings and the transfer of approximately 18 other buildings by 1937.[15] The Boston architectural firm of Perry, Shaw, and Hepburn completed much of the restoration. In a 1988 issue of *The Atlantic*, A. Edwin Kendrew, one of the architects for the early restoration, recalled that during the

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[13] W.A.R. Goodwin, "The Turn of Another Century, Personal Memories by Rev. Dr. W.A. R. Goodwin," 1938. Elizabeth Hayes Papers. Mss. Acc. 2008.279. The Earl Gregg Swem Library Special Collections Database, The College of William and Mary, 4.

[14] For more information on the town's identity, see, Andrea Kim Foster, ""They're Turning the Town Upside Down": the Community Identity of Williamsburg, Virginia Before and After Reconstruction," Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1993.

[15] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 441.

1930s, "there were no clear principles for restoration in those days," and that the restoration team "developed new guidelines as we went, and we took every pain to make the new material look as much as possible like the original."[16] The restoration challenged the architects in their research, but also acted as a catalyst for many of the early twentieth century's restoration and preservation projects. Often Colonial Williamsburg's educators and interpreters portrayed a charming image of the past, both abstractly in the history and concretely in the architecture. For example, in "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia," the authors, including some of the site's architects, argued that "from the riches of the past there is always to be found a precedent of a kind for something that is good looking."[17] Colonial Williamsburg's architectural interpretation in the first decades reiterated the "good looking" parts of the past.

Colonial Williamsburg's Board of Trustees originally agreed on two missions for the site. They focused on authenticity and interpretation. From their perspective, making authenticity a priority ensured that the site recreated "accurately the environment of the men and women of eighteenth-century Williamsburg."[18] The board wanted that accuracy to be conveyed to visitors so that "present and future generations may more vividly appreciate the contributions of these early Americans to the ideals and culture of our country."[19] Goodwin acknowledged the importance of accuracy when he claimed that "from the outset it was recognized that the value of the restoration would be its

[16] A. Edwin Kendrew quoted in Fergus M. Bordewich, "Williamsburg: Revising Colonial America," *The Atlantic*, December 1988, 30.

[17] F. S., Lincoln, Fiske Kimball, William Graves Perry, Arthur A. Shurcliff, and Susan Higginson Nash, *The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia* (New York: F.W. Dodge Corp, 1935), 377.

[18] Board of Trustees quoted in Alexander, *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg*, 2.

[19] Board of Trustees quoted in Alexander, *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg*, 3.

authenticity."[20] Colonial Williamsburg's planners envisioned an authoritative institution and public image, so visitors would recognize and appreciate this superiority. Colonial Williamsburg educators and renovators always expected an audience.

Colonial Williamsburg also established its role as public educator. The decision-makers at Colonial Williamsburg claimed in the second part of their mission statement that the site educated visitors about early Americans. Colonial Williamsburg interpreted early American ideals that were formed by and for early Americans. By implication, those whom the site interpreted were early Americans and those omitted were not early Americans or did not contribute to the nation's formation and its ideals. Colonial Williamsburg educators valued what they were doing because they were teaching about America's culture and ideology. And yet, the narrow interpretive vision that dominated in the early years limited who was included in the story of early America, and by extension, who was considered important in the nation's formation, culture, and ideology.

During the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation created a public image of Colonial Williamsburg as authentic and authoritative. In doing so, the foundation presented a white-washed American past. In Goodwin's records, he stressed authenticity in Colonial Williamsburg's restored architecture, interior decoration, and furnishings.[21] His focus narrowed the interpretation. For instance, the foundation did not initially restore slave dwellings and homes of the lower classes, which meant they failed to collect the related material culture and furnishings. Instead, the foundation focused on collecting the material culture of white

[20] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 427.
[21] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 427.

and wealthy Virginians. These omissions encouraged an account of the past that appeared to be conflict free. Colonial Williamsburg's "Americans" could afford to live in the fine houses and had the finances, time, and opportunity to attend college and act as city figures. Colonial Williamsburg's reconstructed or restored buildings reinforced this interpretation.

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation restored and reconstructed buildings associated with the wealthy, white, and famous, or in the case of the Public Gaol, infamous. For example, the Governor's Palace housed some of colonial Virginia's governors, including Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson. Rockefeller also financed the restoration of the capitol building. Williamsburg residents completed the original capitol in 1699, which then burned in 1747. Goodwin referred to the capitol as the "climax of the restoration endeavor."[22] Williamsburg was the seat of political power in the colony and new commonwealth until Virginia's capital moved to Richmond in 1779. In his 1937 article, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," Goodwin stressed that the Colonial Williamsburg designers showcased the original Charles Willson Peale life-size portrait of George Washington in the restored capital.[23] The emphasis on Washington as the quintessential American is a strand of thought weaved into many of Colonial Williamsburg's public documents and public imageries. This tendency extended to the omission of others. Writers and interpreters often diminished other historical figures by their focus on Washington. The interpreters focused on Washington's greatness. Other individuals, especially enslaved workers, were only acknowledged in reference to

[22] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 425.
[23] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 415.

Washington and his character. For example, Goodwin mentioned Washington's slaves when describing how many times Washington's name appeared on the parish records in conjunction with the slaves' baptisms.[24]

Rockefeller also financed the restoration and reconstruction of the public gaol, public magazine (1714), Raleigh Tavern, and the George Wythe House. Williamsburg residents originally constructed the public gaol in 1701 and it claimed notoriety for incarcerating Blackbeard's pirates before their executions. The George Wythe House represented one of Colonial Williamsburg's favorite residents and structures. Wythe is remembered for serving as the College of William and Mary's first professor of law and signing the Declaration of Independence. Like Washington, Wythe represented much of what Colonial Williamsburg envisioned as the early American. He was wealthy, educated, and white. He was also well-connected, since he mentored Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, and John Marshall.[25] The reconstructed and restored homes and buildings represented the planter elite of Williamsburg. Although the Foundation later incorporated craft shops and work sheds, the site's educators did not historically analyze these peoples' roles in society. To do so necessitated researching the role of diversity, and the accompanying discord and inequality. For many years Colonial Williamsburg did not invest in the history of other buildings like slave cabins, the homes of the poor, less grand homes, or the asylum.

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[24] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 425.

[25] In his personal memoirs, Goodwin described the previous restoration of the Wythe House by the Colonial Dames, Chapter III. This organization first restored the house in the mid-1920s. Goodwin praised the Colonial Dames as a "patriotic organization," thereby reiterating that house represented American values, as embodied by George Wythe.  Goodwin, "The Turn of Another Century," 32.

As Rockefeller Jr. and Goodwin restored Williamsburg, they focused on the architectural and horticultural aesthetics of the colonial capital. They restored a city outside of its historical context, thus exempting it from historical conflict and diversity. To keep the past limited to the social elite and their homes and gardens, the interpreters did not provide context through historical analysis of how these men interacted with their environment. According to Rockefeller Jr., "the restoration of Williamsburg…offered an opportunity to restore a complete area and free it entirely from alien and inharmonious surroundings, as well as to preserve the beauty and charm of the old buildings and gardens of the city and its historic significance."[26] Rockefeller's word choice denoted his unrealistic expectations of the city's past. He hoped to "free" it from its historic context and preserve its "beauty" and "charm." The site started with the idealism of an alluring, simple past, which did not align with diversity and historical struggle. For example, the history of slavery is not "charming."

Early promoters used the media to carry their vision to the public. Goodwin's 1937 *National Geographic Magazine* article, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," is a good example. Like Rockefeller Jr., Goodwin perceived the colonial town in nostalgic terms and painted an appealing picture for the readers of *National Geographic*. He wrote that in this era "life was simple" and that this history "enkindles the imagination of man and quickens his sense of reverence."[27] Goodwin described life as simple, but he did so in reference to the planter elite. Life was not simple for all of Williamsburg's inhabitants, especially for the lower classes. Goodwin's bias towards

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[26] Rockefeller quoted in *Report on The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation with a Summary of the Years 1980 and 1981* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation), 6.

[27] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 402.

conflict-free history united with his narrow version of who was an American. Interestingly, in this same article, Goodwin admonished those who held "romantic" views of the past. But he justified Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation and restoration by arguing that "the restoration of colonial Williamsburg is in itself so romantic and so beautiful that it does not need fictional enchantment."[28] While interpretation at the site steered away from fictional enchantments, fictional omissions and half-truths abounded.

Along with their conflict-free history, Rockefeller Jr. and Goodwin presented a patriotic American history and a public image of Colonial Williamsburg designed to inspire a love of democracy. Rockefeller Jr. wrote that as the restoration progressed, he felt that "perhaps an even greater value is the lesson that it teaches of the patriotism, high purpose, and unselfish devotion of our forefathers to the common good."[29] Rockefeller Jr. did not explain what he meant by "common good," but it conveyed images of harmony and progress. Goodwin reiterated this point when he wrote that the town "grew from the seeds of thought and purpose which were planted by the devotees of liberty."[30] From its inception, Colonial Williamsburg's planners envisioned the site as a place where visitors could be immersed in American ideals and values. Goodwin argued that the restoration, "by making America more conscious of its heritage, will help to develop a more highly educated and consequently a more devoted spirit of patriotism."[31] Goodwin believed that education encouraged patriotism. Goodwin wanted Colonial Williamsburg educators to use the past to create a more active and informed citizenry, but Colonial Williamsburg's

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[28] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 432.

[29] Rockefeller quoted in *Report on The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation with a Summary of the Years 1980 and 1981* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation), 6.

[30] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 402.

[31] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 402.

interpretation was incomplete. Overall, both Rockefeller Jr. and Goodwin defended the site's potential for defining early America and encouraging patriotism. Colonial Williamsburg's interpretive potential depended on its definition of an American, which the site publicized through guidebooks and other articles and addresses.

Rockefeller Jr. and the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation board members recognized the interpretive value of visitor guidebooks as early as the 1930s. In *A Guide Book for Williamsburg, Virginia* (1935), the anonymous author presented a public image of Colonial Williamsburg as historically significant and the interpretation of the site as authoritative. The text described Colonial Williamsburg as "an endeavor to restore accurately and to preserve for all time the most significant portions of an historic and important city of America's colonial period."[32] The 1935 guidebook offered a limited interpretation since it focused only on those individuals who had frequented the buildings that Rockefeller Jr. had chosen to restore. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation associated these persons with "America's colonial period." Although Colonial Williamsburg's decision-makers and interpreters did not deliberately engage in defining the early American identity, the interpretation and restoration highlighted the individuals of the planter elite and dismissed or avoided other Williamsburg inhabitants, like the enslaved community. The 1935 guidebook reflected Rockefeller's vision of Colonial Williamsburg as an appealing architectural restoration, but also mirrored his disinterest in interpreting historical diversity.

The 1937 *Handbook for the Exhibition Buildings of Colonial Williamsburg Incorporated* mostly focused on the exhibition sites of the Old Court House, the capitol,

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[32] *A Guide Book for Williamsburg, Virginia* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1935), 20.

the Public Gaol, the Raleigh Tavern, and the Governor's Palace.[33] By choosing to restore buildings where the wealthy and traditionally important men interacted, Colonial Williamsburg privileged the history of the elite. Although historical diversity and conflict existed in these sites, especially in the gaol, Colonial Williamsburg educators and those who wrote this guidebook downplayed conflict, except for the revolutionary separation from England. The description of the gaol shows how the guidebook's author minimized the severity of eighteenth-century life. The guidebook detailed the building's construction and use, describing the living conditions and meals for the incarcerated as "inadequate." But the guidebook also suggested that life in the gaol was not all that bad since inmates with funds were able to purchase liquor and food from local taverns. In fact, according to the guidebook, "more fortunate prisoners often shared these luxuries with less fortunate cell mates and…the Gaol at times was not without its cheerful side."[34] The guidebook spun the history in a way meant to discount the discomforts of the gaol.

As a public document, the 1937 guidebook communicated Colonial Williamsburg's image to visitors and to general audiences. It also exemplified the site's early interpretation and its aversion to diversity and conflict. As early as the second page, the guidebook erased the colonial town's historical diversity by describing the citizens' interactions as peaceful and by emphasizing harmony instead of struggle. Also, the text minimized the importance and contribution of the enslaved workers by omitting them

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[33] The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation published this document to accompany visitors who toured the exhibition buildings and wanted information on the buildings' layout and history. The book included some illustrations. Although similar to the site's guidebooks, the 1937 *Handbook for the Exhibition Buildings of Colonial Williamsburg Incorporated* focused on specific buildings instead of the entire site and its history.

[34] *A Handbook for the Exhibition Buildings of Colonial Williamsburg Incorporated* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1937), 33-34.

from the population. The Foundation's guidebook argued that "the resident population of Williamsburg in the eighteenth century was composed chiefly of merchants, tradesmen, craftsmen, mechanics, and the like, who lived peacefully for the most part and who profited principally when the wealthy planters and public figures gathered."[35] Not only did Colonial Williamsburg's educators erase diversity and conflict, but they argued that the town owed its stability and identity to the elite population. The Foundation established a hierarchy of historical importance, with the white wealthy and educated at the top.

Discrimination against African American interpreters, especially women, reinforced Colonial Williamsburg's concept of a white, predominantly male American identity and origin. Colonial Williamsburg's publications referred to white guides with acceptance and approval. In contrast, the text often portrayed the African Americans working at the site as second-class citizens and second-class inheritors of the American Revolution. This is seen in Goodwin's 1937 *National Geographic Magazine* article. He described the recently created guide system and explained that "costumed men show the restored Public Gaol to visitors" and that "other men in costume may be seen working in the gardens or serving in buildings."[36] Goodwin defined these men as legitimate employees, with no reference to their qualifications or age. In contrast, Goodwin then described "two old negro women, in fitting costume," who "preside over the Palace kitchen with a courtesy they learned from those whom they affectionately recall as 'ole Missus.'"[37] Goodwin marginalized the women by identifying their age and race, instead

[35] *A Handbook for the Exhibition Buildings of Colonial Williamsburg Incorporated*, 6.
[36] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 443.
[37] Goodwin, "The Restoration of Colonial Williamsburg," 443.

of their historical significance. He also downplayed their value and contribution by asserting that a white woman taught them. Goodwin discriminated against these African American women on many levels, in reference to their race, age, and gender. From the portrayal of these groups of guides, it is clear Goodwin viewed the white males as the more suitable inheritors of the American past. From Colonial Williamsburg's publications it is possible to deduce that the site's financiers, interpreters, and planners wanted an American identity devoid of conflict, diversity, and historical analysis. Instead, the site promoted a nostalgic and patriotic American history. Importantly, Colonial Williamsburg's public image, created through its restored buildings, its publications, and its interpretation, favored an American identity associated with wealthy, educated white men, such as George Washington and George Wythe.

After examining how Colonial Williamsburg's publishers and interpreters used the past to create an American history and an American identity through internally printed documents, it is helpful to gauge how the public viewed the site. Magazines that specialized in antiques, architecture, home furnishings, and gardens spread the vision and mission of Colonial Williamsburg to a broader audience. During the years between the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's origins and World War II, most publications that covered the site reviewed it positively and accepted uncritically the nostalgic, patriotic interpretation. For example, the title of a 1934 *American Homes* article, "Williamsburg, a Shrine for American Patriots," exemplifies how some segments of the public understood the restoration. According to the author Barbara Trigg Brown, Colonial Williamsburg "is not at all a museum city; on the contrary, it is a living community, linking the present and

future with a past that was glorious in the history of our country."[38] When Brown described the city's past as glorious, she effectively acknowledged and accepted Colonial Williamsburg's version of a conflict-free history.

The July 1936 issue of *Better Homes & Gardens* published the article "Williamsburg, The Ideal Home Town." Hiram J. Herbert wrote the article to introduce the site to the magazine's readers. Herbert appeared to embrace the perspective of Colonial Williamsburg interpreters in the first paragraph by claiming that the site attracted people who wanted to "step back two centuries – to quiet, to peace, and to gracious living."[39] Herbert's word choice, using language like peace and quiet, created an image of the past devoid of struggle. As did Colonial Williamsburg employees, he argued for a version of American history where the city's inhabitants lived without conflict. He also postulated that modern Americans would find the city hospitable and welcoming. Herbert echoed the agenda of Colonial Williamsburg publishers by encouraging visitors and readers to identify with the planter elite. In actuality, the planter elite lifestyle would not have been available to most modern Americans due to wealth and other limitations. Hebert's article presented Colonial Williamsburg as offering an authentic and authoritative account of the past. He emphasized Williamsburg's role in American history and its symbolism for the American past, but he narrowed the definition of American identity, including only those who lived in the homes that *Better Homes & Gardens* readers admired. Like his counterparts at Colonial Williamsburg, Herbert did not include

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[38] Barbara Trigg Brown, "Williamsburg, a Shrine for American Patriots," *American Homes*, November 1, 1934, 392.

[39] Hiram J. Herbert, "Williamsburg: The Ideal Hometown," *Better Homes & Gardens*, July 1936, 13.

controversy, conflict, or diversity. Instead, he argued that Williamsburg was an ideal town that later became an ideal restoration.

In a 1937 issue devoted to Colonial Williamsburg, *House and Garden* magazine editors depicted the historic site as the pinnacle of the colonial revival style and as an authority on early American architecture and decoration. *House & Garden* had collaborated with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation to commission three contemporary houses inspired by Williamsburg homes. The Colonial Williamsburg architects Perry, Shaw, and Hepburn designed the homes and the magazine featured the homes in the November issue. In an accompanying article, the magazine's editors introduced readers to the history of Williamsburg and the details of its restoration. While the editors acknowledged that not all the town's inhabitants had lived in extravagant homes, they emphasized the planter elite making them appear to be representative of early Americans.

In the special *House and Garden* edition, the editors praised the restoration at Williamsburg and compared the town to a phoenix rising from the ashes of the past.[40] The authors also submerged the city's history in golden-age thinking, arguing that a soft "climate and a kindly soil and plenty of slaves to cultivate it were the basis on which its social life rested."[41] Although the text included the enslaved community, the authors omitted the evils of slavery so as to create a nostalgic vision of the past. By describing Williamsburg this way, the editors followed Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation. Popular home and garden magazines during the early 1900s promoted Rockefeller Jr.'s

[40] "Williamsburg: What It Means to Architecture, to Gardening, to Decoration," *House & Garden,* November 1937, 39.

[41] "Williamsburg: What It Means to Architecture, to Gardening, to Decoration," 39.

vision of Colonial Williamsburg by emphasizing the architecture and by focusing on the planter elite who lived in and enjoyed the site's grand homes and gardens.

During the 1940s and 1950s, Colonial Williamsburg's publications used the past to teach Americans about patriotism and to relate the story of the country's colonial origins in Williamsburg.[42] During this generation the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation continued to avoid discussing diversity or conflict. The planter elite remained at the center of the narrative. The greater emphasis on patriotism and democratic citizenship were the two major differences in interpretation between the 1940s and 1950s and earlier years. Many Colonial Williamsburg publications reacted to World War II and the Cold War as threats to democracy and the American ideals that the site espoused. Consequently, from the perspective of Colonial Williamsburg interpreters, Williamsburg's planter elite history became a conflict-free inheritance that contemporary soldiers and citizens needed to defend and venerate. In a 1949 Colonial Williamsburg publication, Gerald Horton Bath stated that "no American can leave" the site "without a deeper determination to help to preserve the nation that has been handed down to him."[43] Colonial Williamsburg's public image in the 1920s and 1930s as a shrine to early Americanism and early Americans merged with the idea of a great inheritance during the 1940s and 1950s.

During the Cold War, in the words of Charles Longsworth, former president of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the site was "fired by a sense of duty to inspire and

[42] For more information on Colonial Williamsburg and its programs during the Cold War, see Luke Edward Roberts, "Colonial Williamsburg, National Identity, and Cold War Patriotism," Ph.D. diss., The College of William and Mary, 2004.

[43] Gerald Horton Bath, *America's Williamsburg; Why and How the Historic Capital of Virginia, Oldest and Largest of England's Thirteen Colonies, has been Restored to its Eighteenth Century Appearance by John D. Rockefeller Jr.* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1946).

encourage patriotism, to imbue visitors with a perception of the preciousness and fragility of personal freedom."[44] Rockefeller III, Rockefeller Jr.'s son, grew more involved with Colonial Williamsburg during this era. Later Colonial Williamsburg research historian Cary Carson observed that John D. Rockefeller III "believed that if only the 'enduring truths' which he believed were embodied in Colonial Williamsburg were made known to all freedom-loving peoples, the world would see that light and turn back the Red Tide."[45] Rockefeller III's argument that people could "see the light" at Colonial Williamsburg infused the site with a quasi-supernatural power to alter people and aid the country in the war effort. Rockefeller III and the site's educators employed the usable past to act as a standard of democracy against the perceived enemies of democratic progress.

John D. Rockefeller III hired Edward Alexander to help him expand the educational influence of Colonial Williamsburg's past. Rockefeller III served as chairman of the board of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation during the late 1940s when he hired Edward Alexander as the site's director of education. Alexander helped Rockefeller III mold Colonial Williamsburg into an activist historic site that educated visitors on more than colonial architecture.[46] Alexander claimed that his employers "decided there's been too much emphasis on architecture and that it was necessary to give more attention to (I suppose we'd say) social history."[47] Importantly, Alexander accredited this shift in interpretation partly to Rockefeller III. Overall, among the many accomplishments of his

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[44] *Report on The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation with a Summary of the Years 1980 and 1981*, 6.

[45] Cary Carson quoted in Fergus M. Bordewich, "Williamsburg: Revising Colonial America," 31.

[46] For more information on how Edward Alexander interacted with the different visions and management styles of Rockefeller Jr. and Rockefeller III, see Anders Greenspan, *Creating Colonial Williamsburg*.

[47] Edward Alexander, Interview by Charles B. Hosmer Jr., August 23, Charles B. Hosmer Jr. Papers. Series 4, Box 3. Hornbake Library, University of Maryland, College Park, 1.

tenure at Colonial Williamsburg, Alexander worked to bring in public school groups, strengthen hostess training, and create *Williamsburg: The Story of a Patriot* as one of the first introductory films for museums and historic sites. He also planned new special events for Colonial Williamsburg, like the Antiques Forum in 1949 and the Student Burgesses. Alexander retired in 1972.

Former director of the University of Chicago Press, Donald P. Bean positively reviewed Colonial Williamsburg and examined its war-time programs in a 1942 article, "This War and Williamsburg," Bean described Colonial Williamsburg and its role in preserving the history and legacy of early Americans and their ideals. He claimed that Rockefeller Jr. and Goodwin worked so that the "restored Williamsburg might become the nation's inspirational and cultural center for those who believed that the principles for which our forefathers fought should be maintained as the central feature for real Americanism."[48] Bean's vision of Colonial Williamsburg expressed the site's importance in the psyche of many Americans during the 1940s. Bean also claimed that Colonial Williamsburg embodied American values and principles, making the site and its usable past significant for their role in defining Americans.

Bean's article explained how Colonial Williamsburg designed wartime programs meant to encourage patriotism and democracy. According to Bean, over 15,000 armed servicemen, mainly from Fort Eustis, visited the site. These trips were part of the soldiers' training and were not excursions or "off-time." Bean emphasized that the soldiers learned about the early American values they would be called on to defend. The soldiers' visit to William Park's printing shop, home of the *Virginia Gazette* provided one

[48] Donald Pritchett Bean, "This War and Williamsburg," *The Publishers Weekly*, August 22, 1942, 549.

example. Bean claimed that this visit taught the soldiers how the *Virginia Gazette* “for forty years championed the principles of the American system and insisted on the freedom of the press which still forms so important a cornerstone in our conception of government.”[49] Like similar publications, “This War and Williamsburg” nestled American principles in Colonial Williamsburg’s interpretation and public image. In reality, the soldiers learned a biased and narrow American past and American identity. The servicemen visited reconstructed and restored buildings that historically catered to the upper social stratus. Colonial Williamsburg even used the few structures not directly associated with the planter elite, such as the printing press, to reinforce a nostalgic, patriotic view of the past.

Other war time programs included a nation-wide radio program for soldiers who could not visit the site and a conference for Virginia school administrators on “The War and Elementary School Instruction in American Colonial Life.”[50] Overall, the site’s public history during WWII reinforced its nostalgic view of the past and continued to omit historical diversity and struggle with one exception. The site included conflict in the form of early America’s contestation of English rule. Colonial Williamsburg educators fit their history to the evolving social and political scene by making the war in Europe compatible with early Americans’ struggle against English tyranny and for individual rights.

In the early 1950s, America reassessed its relationship to foreign powers and redefined itself in the context of increasing conflict with the Soviet Union. According to

[49] Bean, “This War and Williamsburg,” 550.
[50] Bean, “This War and Williamsburg,” 550.

supporters of Colonial Williamsburg, the site's interpretation of the American past and identity underlined the nation's uniqueness and separated it from "other" foreign powers. Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation also influenced visitors, including, in Chorley's words, those "refugees who have known the terrors of the lands which lie in the shadow of the Iron Curtain."[51] Throughout his 1951 report, Chorley repeatedly addressed that visitors needed to connect with the site on a meaningful level. Rather than promoting the site solely as a shrine to democracy, the report accentuated a usable past that created an "American-feeling" environment. However, the lack of interpretation and analysis of the role of women, African Americans, and the lower classes in this report suggests that Chorley was most interested in visitors connecting with an elite, sanitized version of the past.

In 1951, Kenneth Chorley, president of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, briefly summarized how the site fared during the year and also stressed its spiritual values. In his presidential report, Chorley promised visitors a connection to the past that only Colonial Williamsburg could deliver. He argued that Colonial Williamsburg's visitors could encounter the past on an emotional, transcendent level. [52] Chorley also asserted that Colonial Williamsburg's "message to the modern American was at base a moral and spiritual message."[53] Regarding the identity promoted by Colonial Williamsburg, Chorley claimed that during the early restoration, Goodwin had envisioned

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[51] Kenneth Chorley, *Colonial Williamsburg, the First Twenty-Five Years: A Report by the President as of December 31, 1951* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Inc., 1951), 18.

[52] Colonial Williamsburg's orientation / interpretive film, *The Story of a Patriot* provides another medium to study how the site used audiences' emotional responses to shape visitor experiences. For more information, see Jenna Anne Simpson, "Screening the Revolution: Williamsburg, *The Story of a Patriot* as Historic Artifact, History Film, and Hegemonic Struggle," Ph.D. diss., The College of William and Mary, 2006.

[53] Chorley, *Colonial Williamsburg, the First Twenty-Five Years,* 12.

Williamsburg as a place where "history would speak to modern Americans; where they would hear a proud voice- a voice strong with faith in God, in democracy and liberty, in integrity, in high moral purpose, a sense of public duty, and responsibility. This, to him, was a shrine of the American faith."[54] As a Colonial Williamsburg publication, this address revealed how the site's chief of staff idealized the site and refused to incorporate conflict into this perfection story.

While not as self-reflective as later reports, *Colonial Williamsburg, the First Twenty-Five Years* resembled many other presidential publications. Like earlier addresses, this report emphasized Colonial Williamsburg's educational role and also devoted many pages to praising the site's devotion to historical and architectural authenticity. For example, Chorley claimed that eighteenth-century Williamsburg represented "one of the important stages on which the American beginnings of the endless struggle for freedom, liberty, justice, and representative government were played for all the world to see."[55] Chorley reiterated the significance of the site, but this quote is particularly interesting for its global perspective. Colonial Williamsburg originated as a shrine to early America and an experiment in historic preservation. By this report's publication, its audience had expanded to a global audience.

In a 1952 in-house Colonial Williamsburg Foundation publication, *The City that Turned Back Time,* Parke S. Rouse Jr. examined the site's history and its public image. Starting in the mid-1950s, Rouse Jr. worked as the Director of Publications at Colonial Williamsburg and helped to publicize many of president Carlisle H. Humelsine's visions

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[54] Chorley, *Colonial Williamsburg, the First Twenty-Five Years*, 8.
[55] Chorley, *Colonial Williamsburg, the First Twenty-Five Years*, 30.

for the site.[56] Rouse Jr. argued that the history presented at Colonial Williamsburg was useful to its visitors, but, more important, it was useful to influential people of the time, such as Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, who both visited the site. Rouse described Colonial Williamsburg as an educational host that provided a "rostrum for ideas which resounded around the world."[57] Along with information on the site's creation and restoration, Rouse described a neutral, conflict-free American identity and history. With history on the sunny-side up, he also depicted the guides and interpreters as an appealing aspect of the site. Rouse described the hostesses as "cultivated" and "charming" and referred to the male interpreters as "cheerful hosts in wig and knee breeches."[58] *The City that Turned Back Time's* many black and white photographs conveyed a "good-time" mentality and demonstrated the site's investment in a positive image of an American identity and past.

Colonial Williamsburg's in-house publications during the 1950s and 1960s illustrate how the educators' construction of American history and an American identity largely failed to incorporate historical diversity and inequality into its definition of an American. For example, the 1955 guidebook illustrates how the site used its publications to create an image of historical order and avoid the issues the diversity and conflict when describing the town's colonial inhabitants. Since the 1930s, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation had continued to reconstruct and restore more structures. Given the increasing complexity of Colonial Williamsburg, the 1955 guidebook was organized by

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[56] Rouse Jr. also worked as a journalist for the *Newport News Times-Herald* and Newport News' *Daily Press* and as a historian with a specialization in Virginian history.

[57] Parke S. Rouse Jr., *The City that Turned Back Time: Colonial Williamsburg's First Twenty-Five Years* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Inc., 1952).

[58] Rouse, *The City that Turned Back Time*.

street instead of by exhibition building. The Foundation created an image of authority by commending its own restoration, architecture, and interpretation. For example, in the introduction, the author stated that the restoration's accuracy guaranteed that visitors to the site witnessed the eighteenth century. While not claiming mimetic realism, the Foundation confidently asserted that its audiences stepped "back across the bridge of years to … a proud plantation society."[59] While Williamsburg was portrayed as a plantation society, no historical context was offered to support that claim. Instead, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation specified that it offered visitors the opportunity to "step back" into a falsely peaceful historical period.

As with previous guidebooks the message was clear about who warranted attention and interpretation. The 1955 guidebook described Colonial Williamsburg as a "laboratory" for visitors to understand "leaders" like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and George Wythe.[60] The Foundation defended focusing on these men because doing so created in visitors an "understanding of the way of life of colonial Virginia and appreciation of the heritage created amid these impressive surroundings."[61] In this guidebook, Colonial Williamsburg educators maintained that the great white men required interpretation and that the site represented early America and Americans. During the 1950s, the site's public image continued to portray the planter elite as the preeminent Americans.

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[59] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook; Containing a Brief History of the City and Descriptions of More than one Hundred Dwelling-houses, Shops & Publick Buildings* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Inc., 1955), 7.

[60] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook; Containing a Brief History of the City*, 7.

[61] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook; Containing a Brief History of the City*, 7.

Once again the interpretation of the public gaol demonstrates the erasure of historical conflict from the Colonial Williamsburg narrative.[62] The anonymous author described the gaol more realistically than the 1937 edition's sanitized depiction, but still provided a somewhat neutral image of eighteenth-century incarceration. The author first evaluated the gaol based on twentieth-century standards: "though frequently tempered with mercy, the treatment and disposition of criminals in the Virginia Colony seems inhumane in the light of prison reforms of the past two centuries."[63] At the same, the author seemed to be claiming that a gaol was necessary, noting that Williamsburg's inhabitants included "newly arrived slaves, transported convicts, runaway indentured servants, pirates, and marauding Indians" and suggesting that it was the presence of these people that necessitated a gaol. [64] In doing so the author uncritically lumped together enslaved workers, lower classes, and native Americans with criminals and implied that a gaol was only necessary because of diversity. Although in this case the guidebook acknowledged the presence of someone other than the planter elite, it failed to provide historical context for the lives of those individuals or to analyze the historical conflict that inequality generally produces.

Like Parke Rouse's *City that Turned Back Time* that documented the first twenty-five years of the historic site, Edward P. Alexander's 1957 *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg,* represented another internally written public document that failed to challenge the site's traditional focus on great white men. Alexander studied Colonial

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[62] Unlike the 1937 guidebook, the 1955 edition more frequently addressed the existence of the enslaved workers and lower classes. However, the 1955 guidebook omitted interpretation on this group's lived experiences or contributions to America's origins.

[63] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook; Containing a Brief History of the City*, 92.

[64] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook; Containing a Brief History of the City*, 92.

Williamsburg's restoration, the site's varied forms of interpretation, and Colonial Williamsburg's relationship with special groups, like school children. He concluded with a discussion of possible future obstacles for the site's growth. Alexander flirted with the incorporation of more diversity in regard to the white lower classes. He argued that the best way to teach how colonials perceived government was through "emphasizing colorful personalities, lively happenings, and important basic documents."[65] Although Alexander's prose encouraged broader interpretation, he remained fixed on Colonial Williamsburg's hackneyed version of the American past and identity. After his vibrant description, he followed with examples of Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry. He iterated how these men embodied the early colonial mindset. After enumerating the contributions of Jefferson and Henry, Alexander added one paragraph on the blacksmith Hugh Orr. Alexander acknowledged that Orr did not fit into the planter elite and thought he could be interpreted from the "common man" perspective. Alexander noted that the craft-shops, where blacksmiths like Orr demonstrated their trade, gave "the best view available of the life of the so-called common man in Williamsburg."[66] Alexander did not explain what separated men like Orr from men like Jefferson. The author also added a pinch of American exceptionalism by asserting that "the fresh land of America meant opportunity with its cheap, fertile farms, its scarce, well-paid labor, and its comparative social fluidity."[67] While this statement may have described Orr's situation, it remained untrue for the African American enslaved workers and others with limited opportunities. *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg* excused and omitted historical

[65] Alexander, *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg*, 9.
[66] Alexander, *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg*, 19.
[67] Alexander, *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg*, 12.

inequality and conflict by promoting stories of the opportunities available to select individuals.

Alexander's description of Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation of everyday life in the 1700s revealed the site's limited analysis of African American history. Alexander included African American history only in relation to Williamsburg's class structure. He described the social ladder of colonial America with the planters and officials on the topic rung and on the bottom run the 'Shoals of Negroes.'"[68] While Alexander addressed the existence of African Americans, since they constituted the bottom rung on his hypothetical ladder, he did not interpret their role in the country's formation or examine their experience. Edward Alexander's *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg* revealed that Colonial Williamsburg resisted stretching its interpretation outside the patriotic interpretation of the elite, white, and wealthy. Alexander's language at times predicted a broader interpretation, but his text never delivered on defining Americans outside the planter elite.

Under the leadership of president Carlisle Humelsine, who followed after Kenneth Cholrey, Colonial Williamsburg maintained its construction of a patriotic, nostalgic past. His *Report by the President for the Year 1958* represented another Colonial Williamsburg publication that created an American history and identity devoid of conflict and diversity. In his introduction to the report, Chairman of the Board of Trustees Winthrop Rockefeller wrote that Humselsine was highly qualified and possessed "a wealth of experience in public affairs, a wide background and knowledge that will be

[68] Alexander, *The Interpretation Program of Colonial Williamsburg*, 14.

invaluable to the Restoration."[69] With such a recommendation, Humelsine's report disappointed with its lack of diverse history. Still, Humelsine acknowledged Colonial Williamsburg's flexibility in interpretation and the usable past. For example, he offered visitor vignettes to show how people of dissimilar ages and interests take away unique meanings. He used the examples of a "tricorn-hatted youngster threading his way through the holly maze of the Governor's Palace garden" and an elderly stroller who discovered at Colonial Williamsburg "warm Virginia sunshine" and "the visible beauty of another age."[70] These images, while idealistic and sentimental, at least indicated that Humelsine realized Colonial Williamsburg's potential to provide various meanings.

Humelsine's report did not challenge the patriotic shrine mentality of Rockefeller's imaginings. Instead, Humelsine described the site's collections and interpretation through the themes of research, archaeology, and furnishings. For example, with the theme of furnishings, Humesline recorded artifacts acquired in 1958. The material culture belonged to the wealthy elites. One list included "a portable organ made in London in the 1750's; a barometer made by the well-known clockmaker, George Graham; and a perfect, six-sided, red-brown stoneware teapot attributed to John Phillip Elers, a pioneer in fashioning sophisticated pottery."[71] This material culture addressed preconceived ideas about the Americans in Williamsburg. The real Americans owned acclaimed pottery and had the leisure time to devote to musical instruments. But if we read against the grain, this report reveals that the site prized a wealthy and white American identity. The report omitted the material culture of Williamsburg's black

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[69] Winthrop quoted in *Report by the President for the Year 1958* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1958), 9.

[70] *Report by the President for the Year 1958*, 31.

[71] *Report by the President for the Year 1958*, 23.

community. However, in Humelsine's conclusion to the section on material culture, he claimed that the furnishings provided a means for better "portraying life in eighteenth-century Williamsburg."[72] This quote demonstrated that the site's educators and curators collected the artifacts they thought represented the colonial city, which did not include the more diverse aspects of the lower classes, African Americans, and enslaved workers. Humelsine eventually mentioned Williamsburg's African Americans on the twenty-seventh page in reference to a research project on the city during the years 1765-1776. The research focused on the political and legal aspects of the slave system and did not examine the lived experiences of the slaves or their community.

Humelsine became president of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 1958, the year when Kenneth Chorley stepped down from the position. During June of this same year, Chorley presented the paper, "No Compromise with Quality," for the *New Hampshire Historical Society*. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation did not publish this document. However, the former president of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation referred to the site as an example throughout his address. "No Compromise with Quality" exemplified how this Colonial Williamsburg educator and administrator viewed the site and stayed within the tradition of promoting a conflict-free history to the public.

In "No Compromise with Quality," Chorley stressed accuracy in historic preservation, using Colonial Williamsburg's restoration as an example. Chorley gave quality the highest significance, claiming that "the gravest fault we can make in the field of historic preservation and restoration is to compromise with quality."[73] He then

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[72] *Report by the President for the Year 1958*, 24.

[73] Kenneth Chorley, "No Compromise with Quality," *Historical New Hampshire*, December 1, 1958, 2.

described Rockefeller Jr.'s restoration of Colonial Williamsburg as a preservation effort with standards of excellence. He also associated this restoration with the core of American history. Chorley claimed that visitors to the site "have an encounter with their history" and "come closer to an understanding of their political inheritance."[74] He then tied this inheritance and history to the new role of the United States as an international power. However, since he mentioned that it is a political inheritance, this narrows the vision of early Americans since many political rights were limited. In a statement evocative of the Cold War mentality, Chorley asserted that America had increased its "responsibility for the peace and security of the world" and that America's history fueled this endeavor. Historic sites like Colonial Williamsburg educated visitors on the "qualities of our fathers and our forefathers."[75]

Chorley also dismissed the interpretation at some historic sites (which he did not name) as faulty and obscure. He stated that "I have visited historic preservations where there were guides who actually obscured or hid the meaning of what the visitor saw."[76] At this point in Colonial Williamsburg's history, the Foundation did not employ black interpreters or interpret the city's historic black population. When Chorley criticized other interpreters for their "hidden meanings," he showed his complete faith in Colonial Williamsburg's own biased history. During this generation, Colonial Williamsburg's American inheritance and identity, as constructed through publications and the site's public image, was narrow and elite and promoted the Cold War values that Chorley espoused.

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[74] Chorley, "No Compromise with Quality," 3.
[75] Chorley, "No Compromise with Quality," 3.
[76] Chorley, "No Compromise with Quality," 5.

One year later, in his 1959 presidential report, *Colonial Williamsburg: The President's Report*, former president of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Carlisle Humelsine created a socially and culturally significant public image of Colonial Williamsburg by comparing the ruined Old Town of Warsaw to Colonial Williamsburg. In World War II, the Nazis had destroyed Old Town, which the Polish people had restored after the war. Humelsine claimed that Colonial Williamsburg, like the Poland's Old Town, embodied its nation's heritage. Likewise, he asserted that Colonial Williamsburg's restorations and reconstructions represented the heart of American history. After this grand assessment of the site's importance, Humelsine's report discussed Williamsburg's development, its unique architecture, and the site's representation of America's political and cultural heritage. His report appealed to an educated audience interested in architecture. His comparison of Colonial Williamsburg to the restored Polish Old Town demonstrated that the author wanted the public to associate the site and its history with the nation as a whole.

Humelsine defined Americans not only by whom he studied, but also by the buildings he praised and identified as American. To Humelsine, early Americans owned land and homes. He described Colonial Williamsburg as a "planter's capital" and asserted that "many of its dwellings were town houses built for the convenience of plantation owners who were called to the city by business, politics, or the gay social life of the capital."[77] As president of the Foundation, Humesline's focus not only on the white population, but the white population that was financially secure enough to own property

[77] Carlisle Humelsine, *Colonial Williamsburg: Report by the President* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Inc., 1959), 14.

in Williamsburg, created a constricted, elite retelling of American origins. For example, Humelsine devoted a page to Williamsburg's residential regulations concerning fences and lot sizes. He asserted that because of this structure, Williamsburg surpassed other settlements, in particular "cramped, medieval" Jamestown, where "row houses reflected privation and the bitter struggle in which survival, not comfort or artistic achievement, was the builder's primary goal."[78] Humelsine's narrow vision of early Americans focused on the homes on the Duke of Gloucester Street and other households of the wealthy, such as planters' town houses like the Taylor house. In doing so, he reiterated a persistent theme: that the real Americans in Colonial Williamsburg were the wealthy, planter elite.

Another in-house work published in 1959, Thomas L. Williams' *Williamsburg in Color*, presented a less text-heavy portrayal of the site and its public history, but reiterated and reified some of the same themes by presenting them visually. Unlike the previous examples and presidential addresses, this work provided abundant visual imagery of the site's conception of the town and its occupants. In *Williamsburg in Color*, Williams included color photographs of the site during the four seasons, along with innocuous labels describing colonial life or the blooming flora. As with other publications from the 1950s, the book did not include human diversity, historical conflict, or analysis on how these issues affected the city's inhabitants. Instead, this Colonial Williamsburg publication covered contentious historical spots, like the enslaved community's work spaces, through describing their "little kitchen gardens" and noting

[78] Humelsine, *Colonial Williamsburg: Report by the President*, 10.

admiringly the "platoons of tulips [that] unfurl their colored banners and proclaim the approach of summer."[79]

*Williamsburg in Color* exemplified how the site often used visually appealing imagery to conceal its lack of historical integrity and context. Williams created a public image of Colonial Williamsburg that accentuated the planter elite and the beautiful gardens, homes, and decorations. Other Colonial Williamsburg publications that mirrored the interpretation found in *Williamsburg in Color: The Williamsburg Art of Cookery; Or, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion: Being a Collection of Upwards of Five Hundred of the Most Ancient & Approv'd Recipes in Virginia Cookery ...* (1958), *The Bookbinder in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg: An Account of His Life and Times, and of His Craft* (1959), and *Plants of Colonial Days: A Guide to One Hundred & Sixty Flowers, Shrubs, and Trees in the Gardens of Colonial Williamsburg* (1959). These publications focused on topics that allowed the author to skirt more contentious issues and included everything from leatherworking and colonial hospitality to plant identification.

Externally published reviews on Colonial Williamsburg during the 1940s and 1950s provide outsider perspectives and information on the site's public image. Many of the externally published documents and assessments of Colonial Williamsburg praised the site for its role in educating Americans about the nation's origins. Colonial Williamsburg's primary audiences, such as those interested in early American studies, home and interior design, and architecture, found the site's public image of a conflict-free history convincing. For example, in the 1945 issue of *The Madison Quarterly,* a

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[79] Thomas L. Williams, *Williamsburg in Color* (Williamsburg, VA: Distributed by H. Holt and Co., 1959).

periodical published by Madison College, author Mary Jansen praised Colonial Williamsburg for its accuracy in interpretation and architecture. In her article "Williamsburg Restoration," Jansen provided scant critical analysis of the restoration, but commended the site's interpretation and, consequently, the site's construction of an American identity. For example, Jansen claimed that Colonial Williamsburg "devoted many years to careful investigation of every possible source of information about life in the old colonial capital."[80] She later asserted that the restored city had "just about reached its colonial appearance."[81] Jansen's argument in favor of the site's appearance and research indicated that even those outside of Colonial Williamsburg's employment were sometimes blind to the site's narrow vision of an American history and identity. Gerald Horton Bath's 1947 article, "Colonial Williamsburg," in *School Arts* also provided a positive review of the site. Bath idealized the great white men that Colonial Williamsburg emphasized. He also argued that these men, such as Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, came to Williamsburg "to take part in the government of the province, to partake of the gay social life and to transact their business."[82] Such romanticized versions not only of these planter elites, but also of the town, speak to conceptions on early Americans among a broader audience. Bath placed so much faith in the restoration and the site's usable past that he claimed that if a colonial patriot were to somehow return to the site, he would perceive it much as he would have his native town.[83] Overall, many external sources favorably reviewed Colonial Williamsburg and accepted its interpretation, narrow view of early Americans, and the conflict-free colonial environment.

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[80] Mary Jansen, "Williamsburg Restoration," *The Madison Quarterly* 5 (March 1945): 79.
[81] Jansen, "Williamsburg Restoration," 80.
[82] G. H. Bath, "Colonial Williamsburg," *School Arts*, January 1947, 168.
[83] Bath, "Colonial Williamsburg," 168.

In the 1960s, Colonial Williamsburg publications often acknowledged the different types of people in the colonial city, but then reverted to the timeworn interpretation of the planter elite. Colonial Williamsburg's self-created public image and its conception of an American during these years represented a last attempt to dodge the steadily growing insistence on better incorporation of diversity and conflict, especially in regards to African American history and the history of the town's lower classes. During the 1960s and into the 1970s, audiences looked for greater diversity in historical narratives at Colonial Williamsburg and other public history sites because of the civil rights movements and a growing awareness of inequality in the telling of the past. But since Colonial Williamsburg still associated conflict with historical diversity, the site hesitated to incorporate diversity into the main narrative.

The hesitance to incorporate diversity into the narrative can partly be attributed to the site's struggle to expand from its earliest characterization as a patriotic and nostalgic shrine for a conflict-free history. For example, former Colonial Williamsburg president Carlisle Humelsine's 1964 *"...A Unique and Irresistible Appeal," The President's Report* addressed diversity but hesitated to discuss its impact. Instead, his report focused on commending the site's architecture, gardens, archaeology, material culture and furnishings, crafts, and the site's historical significance. Humelsine recognized diversity when he stated that Williamsburg "was a proving ground for great statesmen, but for each Washington, Jefferson, Henry, or Mason there were a hundred or more anonymous men, all contributing to the birth and growth of a dynamic new society."[84] He acknowledged

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[84] Carlisle Humelsine, *"...A Unique and Irresistible Appeal." The President's Report* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1964), 37.

the historical presence of dissimilar people, incomes, and opportunities by showcasing the distinction of the planter elite. However, Humelsine avoided discussing what this discrepancy in social status meant for early America, and especially for Williamsburg. Instead, he discounted historical conflict and its role in the formation of an American identity by noting that "Williamsburg was well known in its day for its spirit of camaraderie."[85] Colonial Williamsburg's former president molded the American identity to reflect uniformity instead of accounting for the lower classes' influence and struggle. Although Humelsine mentioned "others," he did not acknowledge their role in Williamsburg, and by extension, early America.

Humelsine's 1964 report is characteristic of Colonial Williamsburg's publications for this decade because it addressed historical individuals outside of the planter elite, but ignored the potential to interpret the accompanying historical conflict. Humelsine's report is a good an example of how Colonial Williamsburg's description of early Americans failed to critically analyze the town's social structure and its role in the colonials' lived experiences. Humelsine mentioned the wealthy homes of the planter elite and a store built in the 1740s. He had the opportunity to weave together the narratives of the planter elite with the less wealthy and prominent store owners. Instead, Humelsine moved to another subject and reported nothing about the lived experiences inside these buildings. Furthermore, he did not connect any of the structures to the enslaved community. His only mention of slaves came in reference to George Washington, who attended a baptismal service for fourteen of his slaves at Bruton Parish Church.[86]

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[85] Humelsine, *"...A Unique and Irresistible Appeal,"* 37.
[86] Humelsine, *"...A Unique and Irresistible Appeal,"* 9.

Humelsine failed to address the paradox of Washington's life as a slaveholder and yet a key figure in establishing American democracy. Humelsine's account reinforced a biased, inaccurate interpretation that treated slaves as simply an extension of the wealthy, "God-fearing" Washington.

Lastly, Humelsine reinforced the postcard image of the site through his chapter on Colonial Williamsburg's gardens, in which he highlighted an image of historic tranquility and uniformity. He maintained that visitors who strolled the town's streets "and sidewalks carry away with them inescapably a sense of a "green country town.""[87] In this publication, the site promoted an American identity that stressed the planter elite's refinement and enjoyment of their quaint environment.

Humelsine's 1965 presidential report, *Cross & Gown*, revealed a little changed worldview. In this case, he defined Americans by the institutions they frequented and summarized the origins and purposes of the College of William and Mary and the Bruton Parish Church. Humelsine argued for a complex, resilient relationship between the church, college, and capitol. The author viewed this interrelationship as a defining factor in early America and key contributing factor to early American ideals. Importantly, he once again ascribed primary significance to the white males of the town for forming the college, capitol, and church. He highlighted certain exemplary individuals, such as the Reverend James Blair, Governor Francis Nicholson, and the Reverend William Dawson. Humelsine also interspersed some of the Founding Fathers in his narrative, such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Although Humelsine did not explicitly define

[87] Humelsine, *"...A Unique and Irresistible Appeal,"* 20.

a colonial American, his focus on white, generally wealthy males continued a long tradition in Colonial Williamsburg presidential reports.

The 1965 presidential report persisted in offering a narrow, exclusive version of those involved in Williamsburg's origins. In his concluding statement as Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Winthrop Rockefeller argued that Colonial Williamsburg's addition of new restorations, such as crafts shops, taverns, and homes, added to the site's diversification.[88] However, this 1965 publication reveals that Foundation still struggled to analyze and incorporate diversity into its dominant narrative and failed to interpret African American history and the history of slavery.

Shirley P. Low's 1965 publication, "Historic Site Interpretation: The Human Approach," proved that by the mid-1960s the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's interpreters and administrators placed greater emphasis on positive visitor experiences than on factual interpretation and the content of the site's tours. At the time of publication, Low had worked for over ten years as Colonial Williamsburg's supervisor for hostess training. Her article stressed hostesses' graciousness and knowledge. At first reading, this publication does not reveal much about Colonial Williamsburg's conception of an American and how this definition related to diversity, historical struggle, and analysis. However, Low addressed the site's priorities in audience interaction and interpretation. Low stressed patience, personal appearance, and knowing where to stand for tours, but did not explain how to interpret conflict-oriented history. Instead, Low's training, which focused on the mechanics of interpretation, such as not eating or smoking in front of public audiences, reflected Colonial Williamsburg's non-confrontational

[88] *Cross & Gown: The President's Report 1965* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1965), 54.

interpretation of the 1960s.[89] In this publication, Colonial Williamsburg's supervisor of interpreters presented a form of education that avoided historical variation and thus any greater context in regards to diversity.

Like the previous editions, the 1968 *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook: Containing a Brief History of the Old City, and Descriptions of More than One Hundred Dwelling-Houses, Shops & Publick Buildings,* summarized and organized the site's history, restoration, and the interpretation based on Williamsburg's streets. The 1968 guidebook mimicked the earlier editions because its language and text duplicated the earlier texts in many sections. This guidebook similarly celebrated Colonial Williamsburg for accurately representing history, even down to the hostess' farthingales.[90] The guidebook provided a positive perspective on the site and avoided or reduced historical diversity, struggle, and analysis of these issues in its American identity.

At first, the 1968 Colonial Williamsburg guidebook reads as though the planter elite represented early Americans and seems to be in alignment with the earlier guidebook editions. However, in its introduction, the anonymous author revised the part of the guidebook that described Colonial Williamsburg as a laboratory for visitors. The 1968 edition informed the reader that Colonial Williamsburg taught visitors about "Washington, Jefferson, George Mason, Patrick Henry, Peyton Randolph, and other

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[89] Shirley P. Low, "Historic Site Interpretation: The Human Approach," *History News* 20, no. 11 (November 1965): 244.

[90] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook: Containing a Brief History of the Old City, and Descriptions of More than One Hundred Dwelling-Houses, Shops & Publick Buildings, Fully Illustrated. Also a Large Guide-Map* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1968), v.

leaders – and of ordinary people, too."[91] The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and its educators, beginning in 1968, felt the need to incorporate more diversity into the historical narrative. As a strategy, the guidebook was revised to include simple and noncontroversial references to "ordinary people." But the revisions were limited and the guidebook continued to focus on wealthy, white individuals. Once again, the gaol serves as a good example. The interpretation of the gaol was not revised. The guidebooks writer also failed to take advantage of the opportunities available. Carter's Grove plantation would have been a good place to address the role of slaves in Colonial Williamsburg and the guidebook, indeed, included approximately two pages on Carter's Grove. However, the 1968 guidebook only mentioned enslaved workers once in this section, in reference to Robert "King" Carter and his wealth, which included slaves. Some evidence suggests that Colonial Williamsburg administrators were increasingly aware of the need for greater diversity, but change came slowly. The 1968 guidebook did not include new information, challenge sanitized interpretation, or teach audiences about the lived experiences of less prominent individuals.

One might speculate that change happened slowly because the leadership remained the same. Humelsine's 1969 presidential report echoed earlier reports and provided an innocuous view of Colonial Williamsburg that applied to casual vacationers and hobbyists, such as individuals interested in colonial gardening or décor. Humelsine's 1969 report failed to define early Americans at Williamsburg. However, he emphasized the gardens in this report, namely, those of the wealthy and white. Color photographs of

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[91] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook: Containing a Brief History of the Old City, and Descriptions of More than One Hundred Dwelling-Houses,* v.

Colonial Williamsburg through the four seasons accompanied these vignettes of colonial life.

Humelsine refrained from mentioning any historical conflict, focusing exclusively on how the site acted as a picture-perfect representation of colonial horticulture. For example, writing about the winter season, he noted that "snow seldom falls, and when it does, usually drifts softly over our homes and gardens, emphasizing the strength of design in the city's buildings."[92] He stressed the temperate climate and the ingenuity of the city's designers. He later credited this structure and layout to the planter elite, making them the creators of this idealistic, colonial paradise. Overall, this report failed to challenge any of the site's interpretation or lack of interpretation. It presented no historical conflict or struggle. Instead, Humelsine masked the site's history by focusing on color photographs of the site's tulips and picket fences. The 1969 presidential address reiterated the Foundation's insistence on conflict-free history, completely avoiding any mention of historical diversity and or incorporating greater historical analysis.

Colonial Williamsburg's interpretive message did not drastically change from the 1930s to the 1970s, but instead flexed to incorporate the subtlety shifting directions of the site's mission and leadership. Under the guidance of Rockefeller Jr., Colonial Williamsburg offered a past that lifted the colonial city out of its historical context and focused on the town's architecture and picturesque past, removing the interpretation of historical diversity and conflict. With an activist mentality, Rockefeller III later adapted Rockefeller Jr.'s mission by broadcasting Colonial Williamsburg's educational and historical value on a global scale. Colonial Williamsburg's publications during this

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[92] Carlisle Humelsine, *"...Some One Always Coming to Perfection…" The President's Report* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1969), 42.

generation promoted a patriotic past and American experience and did not invest in the interpretation of historical diversity and conflict. By the late 1960s, the site acknowledged diversity, but failed to analyze and incorporate diversity into its narrative.

In this chapter I examined how Colonial Williamsburg's educators, interpreters, and researchers used the past to create a public construction of an early American identity that avoided incorporating historical diversity and conflict. From Colonial Williamsburg's inception in the 1920s and 1930s until the 1960s, the site used the past to create a homogenous depiction of the town's colonial inhabitants. Colonial Williamsburg educators avoided portraying historical diversity and conflict in their narrative of the American past in order to create a patriotic shrine to an imaginary American origin story. Many external sources, such as home and garden magazines, agreed with Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation and credited the site with authenticity and authority. In chapter three I study Colonial Williamsburg's publications from the 1970s until recent years and track how the definition of an American altered in response to outside influences, such as social history and counsel from newly hired employees. I also study how Colonial Williamsburg used the past to create an American identity and how this definition of an American eventually included historical diversity and conflict.

# CHAPTER III

# COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG, THE USABLE PAST, AND THE PUBLIC CONCEPTION OF AN AMERICAN IDENTITY, 1970-2000s

In the years after 1970, Colonial Williamsburg's educators expanded the definition of early American. I argue that interpreters at the site increasingly incorporated stories of diversity and conflict into their narratives. They were motivated in part by ideas from the social history movement and by the hiring of new historians and interpreters, such as Cary Carson and Rex Ellis, who both encouraged a broader definition of American. Carson was a Harvard-educated social historian who expanded Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation to better incorporate race, class, and gender. Ellis also influenced Colonial Williamsburg through his work to interpret the history of Williamsburg's African Americans and enslaved workers. Progress has been slow, however, and is ongoing. The site first introduced diversity, then conflict, and is still in the process of incorporating more complex historical analysis. Colonial Williamsburg's publications have complicated this adjustment by continuing to portray the site as a patriotic shrine that promotes a homogenous past. In this chapter I analyze the publications of Colonial Williamsburg to understand how one of the nation's leading historic sites changed the way it used the past.

In the 1970s, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation hired new staff, among them Harvard-educated Cary Carson who self-identified as a social historian.[1] In an issue of *The Atlantic*, Carson described social history's importance, noting that "social history

[1] Cary Carson, "Doing History with Material Culture," in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (New York: Norton, 1977), 42.

seemed to address exactly the kinds of questions that the United States was dealing with in the sixties, including the lasting effects of slavery, the status of women, and the meaning of relationships in general."[2] By better incorporating diversity into interpretation at the site, Carson and other social historians altered Colonial Williamsburg, both how the site was perceived by the public and how interpreters deployed the past. Social historians had no interest in maintaining the public image of Colonial Williamsburg as a patriotic shrine. In fact, many of the newly hired staff at Colonial Williamsburg attempted to expand the site's purpose beyond the original vision of John D. Rockefeller Jr. and W. A. R. Goodwin. Carson led the way, instituting programs and offering re-interpretations that challenged the idea that only the white planter elite mattered in early America.

Implementing a shift in perspective from seeing the past nostalgically and patriotically to seeing the past as the story of all people—even those lowest on the social ladder—met with mixed results. Carson acknowledged that "for many people, history is the core of patriotism, a kind of sacred text, a refuge where they can return to reaffirm their faith."[3] Carson insisted, however, that he did not care if history made him proud, arguing instead for Colonial Williamsburg "as a device to make Americans look at aspects of both the past and the present that they may not want to see."[4] Overall, in the 1970s and more so by the 1980s and 1990s, the image of an American that Colonial Williamsburg's educators presented to the public broadened from a focus on the planter

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[2] Cary Carson quoted in Fergus M. Bordewich, "Williamsburg: Revising Colonial America," 28.

[3] Cary Carson quoted in quoted in Fergus M. Bordewich, "Williamsburg: Revising Colonial America," 31.

[4] Carson quoted in quoted in Fergus M. Bordewich, "Williamsburg: Revising Colonial America," 31.

elite and famous revolutionary figures to include African Americans, women, and the lower classes.

Rex Ellis represented another important hire for Colonial Williamsburg in the 1970s. In 1978, Ellis taught at Hampton University in the theater arts department. In 1980, Colonial Williamsburg established the Company of Colonial Performers, who worked as first person interpreters of ordinary people, not just craftsmen. Ellis was among the new first person African American interpreters.[5] Along with the interpreters, the Foundation increasingly included programs such as public auctions, elections, military recruitments, and black history performances that showcased storytelling and music.[6]

Ellis portrayed the roles of a black minister in Colonial Williamsburg and a recently arrived African. He recalled that his family and friends doubted the value of his work, claiming that "they felt that I had betrayed the black community, and by association, I had betrayed them."[7] In a 1990 issue of *American Visions*, a magazine that studies African American culture and history, Ellis claimed that African American interpreters at Colonial Williamsburg aimed to "infuse the black experience with the white experience."[8] He then added that "Black history is American history."[9] Colonial Williamsburg's new staff hires in the 1970s and 1980s, like Ellis, pushed for more inclusion of African American history, which altered the site's public image.

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[5] For more on the creation of the African American interpretive programs at Colonial Williamsburg, see Anna Lawson, ""The Other Half": Making African-American History at Colonial Williamsburg," Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1995.

[6] *Report on The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation with a Summary of the Years*, 16.

[7] Ellis quoted in Deborah Straszheim, "High Profile: Rex Ellis," *Daily Press*, February 1, 1999.

[8] Rex Ellis quoted in "Colonial Williamsburg," *American Visions*, August 1990, 14.

[9] Ellis quoted in "Colonial Williamsburg," *American Visions,* 14.

In a later issue of *American Visions*, Ellis created a generally positive image of his employer, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, and also addressed the difficulty in interpreting African American history, especially the history of slavery. He remembered that when he began interpreting this history at Colonial Williamsburg, he experienced antagonism from both blacks and whites. He believed that antagonism resulted from Americans having "been raised on diets of heroes and heroines."[10] Colonial Williamsburg's early publications reinforced this hero-worship with its reverent focus on leaders like George Washington and George Wythe. Social historians in the 1970s encouraged greater historical analysis that stripped historical figures of archetypes like heroes and heroines and looked instead to lived experiences. In Ellis's view, visitors needed to understand that history was more than the planter elite. Ellis claimed that he and his fellow African American first person interpreters in the late 1970s led the way for much of the site's interpretation of colonial black life.

As a public document written by a Colonial Williamsburg employee, Ellis' article offered an alternative vision of Colonial Williamsburg. Ellis portrayed Colonial Williamsburg in a positive light. He referred to the developments in African American interpretation at the site as an "adventure" and spoke of setting "the record straight."[11] Ellis saw opportunities to improve Colonial Williamsburg's history of African Americans and incorporate African Americans and the history of slavery, which challenged the notion of heroic white slaveholders, into the American identity. Ellis sent the message that Colonial Williamsburg was innovative if it could attract and hire employees like

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[10] Rex Ellis, "Re: Living History: Bringing History into Play," *American Visions*, February 1, 1993.

[11] Ellis, "Re: Living History: Bringing History into Play."

himself. Colonial Williamsburg's guidebook in the 1970s partially reflected Ellis' investment in creating a more holistic interpretation and incorporating social history.

The 1976 Colonial Williamsburg guidebook reveals how Colonial Williamsburg responded to the social history movement and to suggestions from people they had hired in the 1970s. Most notably, Colonial Williamsburg's educators and administrators included more accounts of enslaved workers, the poor, and ordinary people in the guidebook. The first paragraph of the 1976 edition of Colonial Williamsburg's public guidebook mentioned a woman and enslaved worker. However, the anonymous author downplayed these individuals in light of Colonial Williamsburg's greatness as a restored town. The guidebook reiterated past themes by establishing the site's accuracy. As with previous editions, the guidebook began with a self-congratulatory description of the site's accuracy, claiming that eighteenth-century inhabitants would find it much as they remembered it were they to travel in time to the present. At the same time, the 1976 guidebook distinguished itself from earlier editions because it acknowledged some historical inaccuracies, such as the presence of fire hydrants and the lack of "backyard privies, and unwashed humanity."[12] The guidebook's author created a positive public image of Colonial Williamsburg and minimized historical discrepancies by excusing them. Later, the guidebook's author would apply this cavalier attitude to Colonial Williamsburg's tenuous relationship with social history, as though mentioning historical inequalities was sufficient and historical analysis was not required.

[12] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook: Containing a Brief History of the Old City, and of Its Renewing,* v.

The 1976 guidebook's anonymous author articulated the site's peculiar view of social history through Colonial Williamsburg's six appeals. Historians Richard Handler and Eric Gable have argued that "the six appeals" during the 1970s "corresponded…to important divisions within Colonial Williamsburg's organizational structure."[13] These included architecture, gardens and greens, furniture and furnishings, crafts, history and heritage, and preservation research. The guidebook claimed that the first four of these appeals "are all part of the social history of the colonial period."[14] Yet in their description, the interpretation did not focus on individuals and their lived experiences, as traditionally associated with social history. For example, under the heading "Furniture and Furnishings," the Foundation stated that their collections ran the gamut from the "dreary cells of the Gaol," to the "impressive chambers of the Governor's Palace."[15] But when the guidebook's author explained the site's interpretation through furniture, the author reverted to the time-worn history of the wealthy and white, notably the site's collections of antiques for the Governor's Palace. In this guidebook, Colonial Williamsburg's scope and purpose failed to incorporate the material culture of any of the town's lower class inhabitants.

The author of Colonial Williamsburg's 1976 guidebook flirted with incorporating diversity, thereby broadening its definition of early Americans and shelving its interpretation of early Virginia as the birthplace of perfect democracy. Unlike earlier editions, the 1976 guidebook did not completely omit critical information such as

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[13] Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 66.

[14] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook: Containing a Brief History of the Old City, and of Its Renewing,* x.

[15] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook: Containing a Brief History of the Old City, and of Its Renewing,* viii.

American slavery or the limitations on women's rights.  For example, under the heading, "The Concept of the Integrity of the Individual," the author wrote that individual rights did not extend to "women, slaves, debtors, and others."[16] The guidebook's author failed to offer any historical context or explain how inequality affected the town, its inhabitants, or the early American government and society. Importantly, the Foundation neglected to analyze what this lack of individual rights meant to the disenfranchised and to the formation of American identity. Instead, the guidebook designated the "integrity of the individual" as a central precept of the American identity origin story, without explaining how this experiment in democracy continued and progressed, if half the town's population was African American and thus limited in their rights of citizenship.

In her 1973 review of Colonial Williamsburg for the Museum Education Roundtable, Zora Martin addressed the site's failure to interpret and incorporate African American history. This externally published text challenged Colonial Williamsburg's identity as a site of authority in constructing the American past. Martin explained that when students watched the introductory film, "Williamsburg -- Story of a Patriot," "there is no explanation as to why all of the blacks are seated in the balcony of the church."[17] Martin argued that although the site included the historical African American presence, the site failed to interpret the diversity they brought to the colonial town and how inequality created conflict. Martin wanted the film to include more historical context. Overall, she stated that "a visit to Williamsburg reinforces the antiquated belief of

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[16] *Colonial Williamsburg Official Guidebook: Containing a Brief History of the Old City, and of Its Renewing,* x.

[17] Zora Martin, "Colonial Williamsburg: A Black Perspective," *Roundtable Reports* (1973): 2.

minimal black participation and smiling faces."[18] Colonial Williamsburg educators and administrators struggled to find a way to address historical diversity without admitting the realities of inequality.

However, not all critics reviewed Colonial Williamsburg negatively during the 1970s. For example, Susan Bruno's 1979 article, "By Troupe of Actors: History Comes Alive in Colonial Williamsburg," in Newport News' *Daily Press* positively reviewed Colonial Williamsburg's new first person interpretation. The American history that Bruno associated with Colonial Williamsburg encouraged visitors to see early America in a positive light and as a place that was becoming progressively more democratic. She noted that the eighteen new first person interpreters "promise to make a walk down Duke of Gloucester Street a new and wholly refreshing experience."[19] Bruno positively assessed Colonial Williamsburg's appearance and interpretation and brought a critical eye to the site's interpretation.

Colonial Williamsburg's public image and construction of an American identity altered in the years from the 1980s to the recent past. In the 1960s and 1970s, Colonial Williamsburg's administrators, educators, and interpreters created a new interpretation of Williamsburg's history that better incorporated diversity. By the 1980s and 1990s, the site's interpreters had begun to interweave stories of conflict with diversity, something they had failed to do for decades. The 1994 slave auction at Colonial Williamsburg exemplified one of the most assertive attempts to acknowledge and portray historical

[18] Martin, "Colonial Williamsburg: A Black Perspective," 3.

[19] Susan Bruno, "By Troupe of Actors: History Comes Alive in Colonial Williamsburg," *Daily Press*, June 10, 1979.

conflict.[20] In October of 1994 Christy Coleman, head of the African American interpretation and presentations department at Colonial Williamsburg, supervised the site's first slave auction reenactment. Even before the event took place, critics across the country expressed their doubt and outrage over the staging of a colonial slave auction. *The New York Times* reporter Michael Janofsky articulated the tension on October 8, 1994, writing that critics "contend that education could be trivialized into entertainment and that, in any case, slave auctions were too painful to revive in any form."[21] After Colonial Williamsburg's first person interpreters performed the reenactment, reviews were mixed. However, the site did not incorporate this reenactment into the regular interpretation and has not reenacted another slave auction.

The *Report on the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation with a Summary of the Years 1980 and 1981* addressed some of the issues the site faced as it expanded its definition of early Americans and created a more inclusive usable past. This report included president of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Charles R. Longsworth's essay, "Communicating the Past to the Present." Longsworth explained that former president Carlisle H. Humelsine initiated a committee in the mid-1970s to examine Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation and create new themes to better accommodate the standards of social history. This report resulted in three themes that the site later

[20] For more on information on Colonial Williamsburg's 1994 slave auction, see Erin Krutko, "Colonial Williamsburg's Slave Auction Re-Enactment: Controversy, African American History and Public Memory," PhD diss., The College of William and Mary, 2003.

[21] Michael Janofsky, "Mock Auction of Slaves: Education or Outrage?" *The New York Times*, October 8, 1994.

expounded upon in the 1980s: “Becoming Americans,” “Choosing Revolution,” and “New Consumers.”[22]

Longsworth’s essay also addressed the growing disillusionment with the celebratory account of white, wealthy, and educated men that had previously characterized Colonial Williamsburg’s narrative. Longsworth argued that the site must interpret this history, although it would “be easy to and perhaps popular to embrace social history with passionate abandon and forsake the patriots, retaining their memory as symbolic of an outworn and naïve view of America’s past.”[23] Longsworth showed how Colonial Williamsburg in the early 1980s struggled to retain the site’s original public image but still engage with the new system of social history. This affected interpretation, but Longsworth professed faith in the three themes and in the site’s incorporation of social history, claiming they served “as central strands on which to weave coherent and integrated interpretation.”[24] Longsworth’s report partly revealed how Colonial Williamsburg’s publications interacted with and presented social history.

Along with presidential reports that praised the site’s authenticity, Colonial Williamsburg manicured its public image to communicate its academic and cultural relevance by hosting academic conferences and sponsoring research fellows. In 1980, Colonial Williamsburg invited ten historians to examine the site’s interpretation of African American lived experiences. Aware of the need for change, Colonial Williamsburg administrators and interpreters encouraged the visiting scholars to provide constructive criticism, which they did. For example, historian Rhys Isaac advised

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[22] *Report on The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation with a Summary of the Years,* 7.
[23] *Report on The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation with a Summary of the Years*, 8.
[24] *Report on The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation with a Summary of the Years*, 9.

Colonial Williamsburg's interpreters and researchers "against perceiving the colonial black family in terms of the white family."[25] Thad Tate, another noted historian, recommended that Colonial Williamsburg "put blacks into the larger context of colonial life rather than deal exclusively with black life."[26] These suggestions, given during a pivotal time in the history of Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation, mark the beginning of Colonial Williamsburg's administrators seriously engaging the question of how to interpret the lives of African Americans. The fact that the site published information on these visiting scholars also spoke to Colonial Williamsburg's effort to be seen as relevant and progressive, which was not the case in the 1960s when conflict-free history was the priority.

In Cary Carson's 1985 Colonial Williamsburg publication, *The History Museum as Educator*, Carson reaffirmed the site's public image of relevance by acknowledging the importance of the usable past for museums and historic sites. Carson argued that scholars employed by museums did not possess the "academic freedom to be irrelevant."[27] Instead, he called for a past that resonated with visitors, but also challenged them to think critically about how the past contributed to the present. Carson believed museum education should concentrate on visitors. He claimed that he and fellow Colonial Williamsburg interpreters intended to "present Williamsburg as a case study of social

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[25] Rhys Isaac quoted in James R. Short, "Black History at Colonial Williamsburg: Prominent Historians Take a Look at the Foundation's Approach and Come up with Suggestions for a Broader Interpretation," *Colonial Williamsburg Today* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1980): 10.

[26] Thad Tate quoted in Short, "Black History at Colonial Williamsburg," 11.

[27] Cary Carson, *The History Museum as Educator* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 19850), 4.

change."[28] Carson's article suggests that the character of Colonial Williamsburg, as a shrine to democracy, had shifted.

In Colonial Williamsburg's 1991 publication, *The Challenge of Interpretation*, the anonymous author conveyed a basic history of early Virginia that expanded Colonial Williamsburg's American history. The author claimed that *The Challenge of Interpretation* would "illustrate a larger canvas and portray a larger community, one which the heroes led, but from which they also came."[29] The book's author focused on the subjects of government, work and enterprise, family and community life, and cultural life. *The Challenge of Interpretation* pulled on themes from *Becoming Americans* because it located Williamsburg in the story of early America, instead of celebrating it as the pinnacle and birthplace of early American democracy and revolution. The text included diversity, especially as it related to the unequal opportunities for Williamsburg residents, but did not show how these diverse elements mixed in the historical context.

*The Challenge of Interpretation* revealed how Colonial Williamsburg struggled to overcome its penchant for optimistic history. For example, the following quote demonstrates that the author recognized historical inequality, but wanted to present a sunny side of the story: "the history we want to teach is a success story, at least for those of European stock."[30] The authors then explained how the colonial social system benefited whites. The interpretation then discussed slave labor, the English culture, and other European cultures and group traditions. *The Challenge of Interpretation* did not integrate the material well. As witnessed through this Colonial Williamsburg publication,

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[28] Carson *The History Museum as Educator*, 37.

[29] *The Challenge of Interpretation* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1991), 13.

[30] *The Challenge of Interpretation*, 10.

the site conveyed an American history that included some conflict and diversity, but did not combine the narratives.

Colonial Williamsburg's educators during the 1980s and 1990s failed to create a unified vision of an American. In some texts the authors argued that the site aligned with social history and incorporated diversity and conflict. However, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation still published books that reproduced the interpretation from Colonial Williamsburg's early years. For example, George Humphrey Yetter in his1993 *Colonial Williamsburg Before and After: The Rebirth of Virginia's Colonial Capital* avoided mentioning African Americans, women, or working people; it read like a coffee-table history book, replete with professional color photographs. [31] The Foundation originally published the book in 1988, with a fifth printing in 1993.Yetter used research available to him through his position at Colonial Williamsburg's John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, where he worked as the associate curator of architectural drawings and research collections. Yetter focused on Williamsburg before Rockefeller Jr.'s restoration, the site as the colonial capital, the town after the state capital shifted to Richmond (this section included detailed information on Williamsburg's role in the American Civil War), and lastly, the Colonial Williamsburg restoration. As a Colonial Williamsburg publication, this book represented the site aesthetically with appealing photographs and uncritical generalizations about colonial Virginia that mirrored the nostalgic history that the site's founders had supported initially.

[31] George Humphrey Yetter, *Williamsburg Before and After: The Rebirth of Virginia's Colonial Capital* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988, 1993).

As late as the 1993 edition of *Colonial Williamsburg Before and After*, the site promoted a narrow interpretation of who was important to Williamsburg. However, Colonial Williamsburg's administrators still insisted that they educated Americans about their history. For example, Yetter explained the decisions made by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, arguing that they "believed an awareness and appreciation of the principles and values reflected in the daily life of the Virginia colonists as they became Americans could aid in charting the best course for future generations."[32] He then termed their plan to work toward authenticity "ingenious" and described those individuals working on the site's early research as "eminently qualified."[33] In this publication, Yetter, as a Colonial Williamsburg Foundation employee, portrayed Williamsburg as the training ground for the American Revolution and later as a site of distinguished architectural restoration. Yetter failed to mention the enslaved community and their role in forming Williamsburg and colonial America. Although Yetter intended for this publication to serve as a visually appealing historical summary, its uncritical approach rendered it ineffective at encouraging critical thought. However, some of Colonial Williamsburg's educators and authors used their research to advocate for a complex, often messier colonial past.

Unlike Yetter's publication, Olmert's 1998 *Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg* revealed how Colonial Williamsburg grappled with the issues of diversity and historical conflict. Like most Colonial Williamsburg publications, Olmert's work advocated for the site's superiority to other historical sites. He claimed that the site

[32] Yetter, *Williamsburg Before and After*, 60.
[33] Yetter, *Williamsburg Before and After*, 60.

allowed visitors to step back in time and told them it could be "the most important vacation you will ever take."[34] Olmert's guidebook followed the pattern of most Colonial Williamsburg publications by asserting the site's superiority in restoration and historical accuracy. At first glance, the1998 guidebook appears little changed from its predecessors. Olmert opened with a reference to the great white men of the planter elite. He invited visitors to "debate the Stamp Act with Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, or George Washington," and to admire the colonial fashions of the upper classes.[35] He reminded his readers, however that they would also "encounter the African-American slaves and free blacks who made the Virginia colony's prosperity possible."[36] While Olmert made African Americans visible in the guidebook in a way that previous authors had not, he offered little in the way of critical analysis.

Olmert's version of the guidebook suggests that Colonial Williamsburg educators were struggling to present conflict and diversity to the public. Instead of historically analyzing this information and contextualizing it in the colonial city, the site's educators often simply mentioned the diversity and conflict, then moved onto another subject. For example, Olmert included vignettes of enslaved workers and free blacks who lived and worked in Williamsburg. Olmert wrote one section on Bristol, an enslaved worker owned by Thomas Everard. Olmert included information on Bristol's work conditions and lived experience. However, he framed most of Bristol's story in reference to his owner. For example, when Olmert described Bristol's intelligence, he then added that "Everard relied on him to deliver messages, run errands, and purchase provisions for the

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[34] Michael Olmert, *Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1998), 7.

[35] Olmert, *Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg*, 7.

[36] Olmert, *Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg*, 7.

household."[37] Olmert recognized Bristol as an early American, but did not disclose how Bristol symbolized diversity and inequality at the site. Instead, Olmert diverted attention from Bristol and focused on how the enslaved workers fit into the more familiar narrative of the planter elite.

Olmert's 1998 guidebook publicized Colonial Williamsburg's efforts to incorporate conflict into its narrative by telling the story of the unequal treatment of the mentally ill. The Williamsburg Public Hospital first opened in the fall of 1773 and housed the region's mentally ill.[38] The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation restored the structure between the mid-1970s and 1985. This restored space contained the potential to portray complex, challenging narratives of how colonial Americans regarded society's marginal peoples. On the one hand, Colonial Williamsburg's decision makers included diversity and conflict by recreating the public hospital and interpreting its spaces and stories. However, the *Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg* demonstrated the site's hesitation to associate this information with larger picture of the colonial town. Olmert argued that the mentally ill lived who lived in the hospital experienced inequality, but did not connect this to Williamsburg, its inhabitants, and the early American social structure. Olmert included diversity and conflict in conjunction with the site's recreated and restored structures. However, the author failed to show how this diversity and conflict, in

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[37] Olmert, *Official Guide to Colonial Williamsburg*, 76.

[38] Constructed in 1773, Colonial Williamsburg's Public Hospital acted as America's first state-supported hospital for the mentally ill. It burned down in 1885. The recreated hospital now is the location for the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum as well as an exhibit on the mentally ill. This recreated hospital includes a cell that visitors can enter that features a straw-filled pallet and squalid living conditions in regards to sanitation. As director of Colonial Williamsburg's architectural research in 1988, Edward Chappell argued that the interpreters used "the mentally ill as an example to show how society dealt with people it perceived as deviates." Edward Chappell quoted in Fergus M. Bordewich, "Williamsburg: Revising Colonial America," 26.

regards to African Americans and the mentally ill in particular, affected the broader picture that the site conveyed.

Along with better interpretation of the history of Williamsburg's mentally ill, the site's numerous African American history programs expanded the concept of an early American. In a 1993 article for the journal, *Colonial Williamsburg*, Curtia James narrated her experience as a first person interpreter portraying a slave at Carter's Grove. James worked as a communications associate for the foundation's department of African American interpretation and presentations. In her article, "To Live Like a Slave," James stated that part of her job included the responsibility to "familiarize people with the issue of slavery, to make them understand the institution as a fact of American history."[39] In doing her job, James broadened the concept of American history at Colonial Williamsburg, which then broadened the definition of who was an American.

Colonial Williamsburg's programs and publications in the 1990s also debunked some of the romanticism of the site's early interpretation. In the *Colonial Williamsburg* journal, first person interpreter Sylvia Tabb-Lee described her experiences in teaching audiences about the discrepancies in colonial wealth. She explained that she welcomed visitors to the slave dwellings in Carter's Grove by announcing that only two percent of the city's white residents lived in structures as large and "romantic" as the plantation house.[40] She then asked the visitors to imagine where they fit in the economic spectrum. She argued that the "average person lived in a 15-by-15 foot house with a dirt floor."[41] Her interpretation de-romanticized Colonial Williamsburg and challenged visitors'

[39] Curtia James, "To Live Like a Slave," *Colonial Williamsburg* 16, no. 1 (Autumn 1993): 16.
[40] Sylvia Tabb-Lee quoted in Curtia James, "To Live Like a Slave," 16-17.
[41] Sylvia Tabb-Lee quoted in Curtia James, "To Live Like a Slave," 17.

assumptions about life in the past. It also encouraged audiences to visualize Colonial Williamsburg as more than the restored homes of the planter elite.

*Becoming Americans: Our Struggle to be Both Equal and Free* was a seminal text in Colonial Williamsburg's changing understanding of its mission. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation published its first draft of *Becoming Americans* in 1994. For the next four years, over sixty collaborators edited the text with a total of five separate drafts. The Foundation listed Cary Carson as editor. Over 60 authors and editors contributed to the project. The final edition, the 1998 publication, represented the ability of Colonial Williamsburg's staff and educators to work together and alter the site's research foci and interpretation. The authors chose the theme "Becoming Americans," with the subtitle, "Our Struggle to be Both Equal and Free." With this title Colonial Williamsburg acknowledged a common heritage and a conflict-driven history. The word "our" implies a joint investment, so the authors assessed that Revolutionary history as "ours" instead of "theirs."

In the introduction, the authors defined *Becoming Americans* as a public document, with an intended audience that included Colonial Williamsburg's staff and educators, as well as public educators and general audiences.[42] At its core, *Becoming Americans* is a diverse interpretation of Colonial Williamsburg's past, but also of the colony of Virginia and early America. Carson argued that the site needed to encourage visitors to experience more than the quaint buildings and idealized Americans. Carson articulated the difficulty by stating that "America's Williamsburg" was so

[42] Cary Carson, ed. *Becoming Americans: Our Struggle to be Both Equal and Free* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1998), vii.

> Indelibly…inked into the mythology of our national heritage that those of us whom the foundation employs as educators are often hard pressed to help visitors see beyond Williamsburg's picture-postcard reputation and to appreciate the substantive historical issues that can make their encounter with the past deep and enduring.[43]

Carson articulated from a firsthand account the difficulty in integrating social history into the interpretation.

*Becoming Americans* epitomized the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's efforts to provide a broader historical context, an expanded definition of a colonial American, and a better understanding of how race, class, and gender formed identity. This shift in interpretation is pivotal to understanding how the definition of Americans changed, as well as how the site's usable past altered. In this new interpretation, Colonial Williamsburg no longer symbolized the entire colonial experience, and the great men were no longer seen as representative of all Americans, although they had once been the main preoccupation of Colonial Williamsburg's educators. Instead, Carson and other interpreters tried to fit Williamsburg into a national narrative that did not revolve around the actions of a few wealthy white men.

The authors separated *Becoming Americans* into chapters that reflected the site's interpretive plans and summarized the historical context that Colonial Williamsburg had previously ignored. With "Becoming Americans" as the overall thematic interpretation, the authors created six focal points, "Taking Possession," "Enslaving Virginia," "Buying Respectability," "Redefining Family," "Choosing Revolution," and "Freeing Religion." Each of these themes served as a chapter in the book, as well as a goal for later interpretation. The chapters addressed diversity and the formation of an American

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[43] Carson, *Becoming Americans*, 3.

identity, even if they did not define early Americans explicitly. For example, the chapter "Taking Possession" studied the complex interactions between Native Americans and European settlers and also examined how ideas like individual property rights evolved in the Virginia colony. Although the authors did not extend an American identity to the Native Americans, they demonstrated how the American identity formed in the context of multicultural interactions and accommodations. This broader assessment of early Americans included the struggles and controversies associated with the relationship between Native Americans and settlers, thereby diversifying the American origin story.

Overall, *Becoming Americans* marked a transformation in Colonial Williamsburg's usable past, public image, and definition of early Americans. The site promoted a more nuanced understanding of the past and placed Colonial Williamsburg in the larger scope of American history and the Atlantic world. Colonial Williamsburg's educators, authors, and researchers realized that social history included controversy and also meant more complex history. Social history encourages the analysis of historical conflict and runs counter to the "postcard" image of colonial life. Through its six themes and overall thematic interpretation, *Becoming Americans* complicated the image of early Americans to show how interactions with Native Americans, the solidifying slave system, and other factors contributed to a multifaceted, often contradictory democratic nation and national identity. As Colonial Williamsburg's educators and interpreters incorporated the research from *Becoming Americans*, the site's president contemplated how this research applied to audiences.

Colin Campbell, the president of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, argued that Colonial Williamsburg's history had the potential to galvanize audiences to become

more informed and active citizens. In his 2006 speech, "From Subjects to Citizens: The American Experience," Campbell stressed civic education and participation and created a public image of Colonial Williamsburg as a place that welcomed diversity. Campbell's view of history recognized conflict as a necessary element of democracy. Campbell used diversity and conflict to argue that although the past was contentious, people still progressed. Campbell characterized American history as inharmonious and claimed that early Americans had debated their role as citizens. Campbell viewed that debate in a positive light and portrayed a steadily advancing American past and identity. Campbell argued further that Colonial Williamsburg's mission pivoted on teaching about citizenship and its obligations. He concluded that "history is the key to not only informed citizenship, but engaged citizenship. It offers a nearly inexhaustible guide of experience and wisdom, failure and recovery, ignominy and glory."[44] In his speech, Campbell fashioned a key role for Colonial Williamsburg in educating Americans about their responsibilities as citizens in a democracy. In doing so, Campbell not only created a dynamic, valuable identity for Colonial Williamsburg specifically, but also for the American past generally.

Colonial Williamsburg's 2013 publication *The Idea of America: How Values Shaped our Republic and Hold the Key to our Future* symbolized the site's most intentional campaign to research how historical conflict and diversity affected the American identity. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation created *The Idea of America* as an online, interactive program for high school students.[45] The Foundation followed up

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[44] Colin Campbell, "From Subjects to Citizens: The American Experience," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 72, no. 22-23 (September 2006): 650.

[45] http://www.history.org/history/teaching/ideaofamerica/ Access Date - October 13, 2014.

by commissioning the *Idea of America* as a book for general audiences. Authors H. Michael Hartoonian, Richard D. Van Scotter, and William E. White examined how Americans historically navigated between conflict and compromise. In the introduction, foundation president Campbell described the book as "instructive" and argued that it was consistent with Colonial Williamsburg's commitment to the public's education and enrichment. Campbell praised *The Idea of America* by claiming that it aligned with Colonial Williamsburg's famous motto: "That the future may learn from the past."[46] Campbell joined Rockefeller Jr.'s vision of Colonial Williamsburg with the interpretive framework of the twenty-first century.

The authors of *The Idea of America* acknowledged colonial American inequality in *The Idea of America*. They addressed the historical diversity and conflict associated with inequality between races, religions, and gender. They examined how these issues related to the larger construction of an American identity and history. This publication represented one of Colonial Williamsburg's first efforts at a combined narrative, where the site did not favor unity and harmony over the conflict that defined the past. To stress the nature of conflict, the authors framed the themes in terms of oppositions. Those themes included law versus ethics, private wealth versus common wealth, freedom versus equality, and unity versus diversity. The authors then applied these themes to topical chapters, such as culture, education, and protest. The authors argued that while America was not superior to other countries, it was unique. They defined the American past as an

[46] H. Michael Hartoonian, Richard D. Van Scotter, and William E. White, *The Idea of America: How Values Shaped our Republic and Hold the Key to our Future* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2013), 3.

"American experiment," which at its "soul" was an "enduring debate."[47] The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation reversed its earliest public image that presented the American past as non-confrontational, harmonious, and superior to that of other nations.

*The Idea of America* avoided the optimistic history that defined much of Colonial Williamsburg's earlier interpretation. However, *The Idea of America* still promoted a positive end to history and conflict. While the authors did not avoid the harsh realities of the past, they portrayed historical figures as characters who made decisions that altered their lives and their society. Many of the examples depicted men and women who resisted inequality and ultimately created positive change. For example, when the authors discussed law versus ethics, they argued that it was sometimes necessary for people to break the law to act ethically. They used the example of Rosa Parks, who broke the law to advocate for civil rights. The authors then claimed that the "tension between law and ethics can lead to a better legal system and a better society."[48] Although there is some truth to this statement, the authors declined to admit history does not always "turn out" for the best.

*The Idea of America* promoted a conflict-driven history with the aim of involving readers in their nation and its future. The authors wanted readers to learn about the past, but also to invest in the country's future. They likewise hoped to invoke a civic response to the text, arguing that Americans should "debate passionately but with the understanding that citizens work to build coalitions and strong foundations for the future of the Republic."[49] *The Idea of America* and its online counterpart provided a new

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[47] Hartoonian, *The Idea of America,* 9.
[48] Hartoonian, *The Idea of America,*10.
[49] Hartoonian, *The Idea of America,*166.

interpretation of American history for Colonial Williamsburg, since the Foundation publicized an image of the American past that included diversity, violence, and struggle. *The Idea of America* presented a comprehensive narrative that served as a lesson on how Americans negotiated and fought for equality.

It is difficult to gauge the public perception of Colonial Williamsburg in the 1980s, 1990s, and recent past because the site tried to be many things to many constituents. The site attempted to align itself with the growing standards of academic and social history, but also tried to cater to conservative visitors who remembered the site as a shrine to democracy. As late as the mid-1990s, some external sources continued to perceive Colonial Williamsburg as a place of fairy tales and historical nostalgia, and failed to see its emerging emphasis on a broader American past. For example, in a 1995 issue of *Town & Country*, Celia Barbour and Michael Arnaud claimed that Peter Pan would be impressed with Colonial Williamsburg because the entire town "decided not to grow up."[50] Overall, Colonial Williamsburg continued to straddle the line between a nostalgic past and one that signified inequality and disunity.

Outside sponsors and publishers recognized this tension and some funded the site's efforts to create a broader interpretation. For example, in 2010, David Rockefeller, the youngest son of John D. Rockefeller, pledged one million dollars in conjunction with a National Endowment for the Humanities grant that supported research, programs, and interpretation related to African American history. The grant funded not only Colonial Williamsburg's research on African American history, but also funded programs that would make this research more accessible to the site's audiences and the public. An

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[50] Celia Barbour and Michael Arnaud, "Dwelling in the Past," *Town & Country*, November 1995.

article for *States News Service* explained that part of the endowment officially reinforced Colonial Williamsburg's "application of research to…work in public history."[51] This grant, which is ongoing as of 2014, and the publications associated with it, will alter and supplement Colonial Williamsburg's public image, usable past, and depiction of an early American.[52]

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's educators and researchers consciously fashioned a usable past for the site's visitors. In the 1930s and 1940s, Rockefeller Jr. and Goodwin anticipated that their restored colonial town would embody American ideals and colonial architecture. Rockefeller Jr. and Goodwin divorced the past from its historical context, removing the interpretation of historical conflict and diversity. The site's interpreters used the past to create a specific aesthetic environment and many visitors and critics associated Colonial Williamsburg with authority and authenticity. During the Cold War, the Foundation's mission altered under the leadership of Rockefeller III, who wanted the site's past to apply to global politics and democratization. Rockefeller III's usable past emphasized the American inheritance of responsibilities and rights that the colonials formed and bequeathed to current Americans. In the 1960s and 1970s, Colonial Williamsburg's educators failed to create a consistent interpretation of an American identity. By the 1980s and particularly into the 1990s and recent years, Colonial Williamsburg's interpreters analyzed the role of historical diversity

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[51] "David Rockefeller Pledges $1 Million to Support African American Initiatives," *States News Service*, January 15, 2010.

[52] Numerous other large donations shaped Colonial Williamsburg's interpretation of an early American, such as the 2014 grant from Dominion University. The university bequeathed a 150,000 to Colonial Williamsburg to further its black programs and research, in particular its first person interpretation. "Dominion Announces More Than $500,000 in Grants to Support Diversity Initiatives," *PR Newswire*, March 21, 2014.

and conflict in colonial America. Visitors still learned about the colonial capital of Virginia and the early American ideals of freedom of speech. But the site's interpreters and publishers integrated historical conflict and diversity by relating the stories of the town's African Americans, women, the poor, and the mentally ill. The decision to include the history of marginalized people made it difficult to sustain the notion of a homogenous American identity. In the 1980s and 1990s, Colonial Williamsburg interpreters offered a usable past that invited audiences to critically examine America's origins and how early democratic principles--and the failure to live up to those principles--affect people today. The site's leadership still struggles to portray and maintain a consistent interpretation of an American identity. However, over time the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has developed a more dynamic and inclusive American past that influences how audiences apply this knowledge on a practical and personal basis.

In conclusion, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's public description of an American adapted and altered through the years, but the site has maintained its self-image as an institution of educational and cultural significance. As recently as the 2013 presidential report, the site polished its public image as an educational institution that had maintained its authority and relevance in the twenty-first century, claiming that Colonial Williamsburg communicated "how one 18th-century Virginia community not only contributed to American leadership, but also inspired the world." While Colonial Williamsburg's sense of its own importance has not shifted, the way it has presented itself to the public has altered through the years. Three avenues of research, in particular, would further illuminate the relationship of Colonial Williamsburg to its public: the media's role in commodifying Colonial Williamsburg's public image; the extent to which

the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation actively engaged its audience in the process of constructing historical meaning; the influence of the Internet. During the last twenty-five years, the internet and social media have expanded the public's means of communication and this is reflected in the myriad of reviews of Colonial Williamsburg available online. Continuing study of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation's public image and its interpreters' use of the past will benefit the field of public history because Colonial Williamsburg's staff actively engage in public history as they encourage audiences to learn about the colonial past and the early American identity.

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