Preserving Difficult Histories
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Cover: Angola Prison Camp H guard tower displayed in an exhibition about segregation at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE

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Introduction: Reframing the Historical Narrative at Sites of Conscience

ASHLEY NELSON AND SARAH PHARAON

Presenting painful history to the public is difficult, as historians, museologists, preservationists, and activists well know. The complexity arises due not only to the nature of the subject matter—so often the shameful, the hidden, the utterly regrettable—but also to the perspectives, prejudices, and weaknesses that audiences bring with them to the experience.

Sites of Conscience, which include museums, historic sites, and memorials that use the past—both distant and recent—to spark action that confronts today’s human rights abuses, know this predicament all too well. As the only global network that connects these distinctive spaces, we at the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience help sites navigate this terrain every day. We know that history is not just about examining objects—a Confederate flag, a Native American artifact, a gas chamber—but about recognizing the lives those objects touched. Historical objects and sites tell humanity’s most fraught stories. Not only do they stand as painful reminders of our failure to live up to our ideals then but also of how we continue to fall short of them now.

This has not been lost on the preservation community. For many years we have confronted this predicament by emphasizing just how multilayered history is and, increasingly, by working to ensure that all stories, not just the best known or the most prevalent, are told. It is through no small effort that figures, from abolitionist and suffragette hero Matilda Joslyn Gage to enslaved children whose names we don’t know, are remembered in the American narrative. And yet we would be remiss—particularly at this difficult time in U.S. history—if we did not pause and acknowledge the limitations of our approach. For however well intentioned it may be, this multidimensional methodology still pits lesser-known stories against dominant narratives.
FLIPPING THE NARRATIVES

Of course, traditional narratives are often necessary, or at least relevant, to telling lesser-known stories. And sharing multiple stories does not necessarily mean depicting all of them as equally important. Yet we must recognize that, in and of itself, telling multiple stories is not sufficient to ensure that we are using history to build an equal and just future. At this critical moment, we must ask ourselves whether it is time to take a more dramatic approach and turn the tables on conventional historical perspectives. What would a history that truly defined, prioritized, and amplified the most difficult stories look like? Could we have a Monticello, for instance, that spoke minimally of Thomas Jefferson, focusing instead on the story of Sally Hemings, whom he enslaved? What would that say about history? About us?

This approach should be more than a thought experiment. Over the course of our nearly 20-year history, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience has come to recognize the value of flipping the narrative. Our members around the world have broken new and important ground by privileging survivors’ stories. Engaging history from the bottom up, so to speak, not only brings relief to the victims of its most painful chapters but also engenders empathy—and thus develops ethical values—in everyday audiences. Activating history in this way enables it to perform its most honorable duty: to bring peace in both personal and cultural contexts.

VILLA GRIMALDI

Since our founding in 1999, this victim-centered approach has been a central tenet of Sites of Conscience—beginning with one of our founding members, Villa Grimaldi. Located on the outskirts of Santiago, Chile, the site presents the 1973 coup d’état—and the 17 subsequent years of a brutal terrorist state that detained and “disappeared” thousands of citizens—not through a series of staid facts but through the stories of those whom the regime once victimized and silenced. The space is part memorial and part inspiration for contemporary activism.
The site itself was one of the epicenters of secret detention and violence during the military dictatorship. Approximately 4,500 people suspected of opposing the regime were kidnapped from their homes or from the street, blindfolded, and brought to Villa Grimaldi. Once there, they were detained, interrogated, and tortured. Four were executed, and 226 went missing. It was later discovered that many were drugged, strapped to railroad ties, and dropped from helicopters into the sea. Since the bodies cannot be found, hundreds of Chileans don’t know whether their relatives, last seen alive at Villa Grimaldi, were indeed among those victims.

In 1996 a group of Villa Grimaldi survivors founded the Corporación Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi (Villa Grimaldi Peace Park Corporation) to preserve the site and use what happened there to promote a culture of honoring human rights. Most of them were concerned with evoking—showing rather than telling—the experiences of the victims. For example, colorful mosaics created from pieces of pavement found at the site are scattered throughout the park, but always on the ground because perpetually blindfolded detainees rarely ever saw anything else. Some of the mosaics have been reconstituted into plaques, which are also installed on the ground, to recall the structures that once stood there—for example, “torture room.” A rose garden has been re-planted at the spot where blindfolded women prisoners remembered smelling roses as they were marched to and from interrogation rooms. The Corporación invited the families of these women to plant the rose trees, each dedicated to a different victim.
Villa staff draw direct connections between the history of the site and contemporary challenges, such as the violence and exclusion that immigrants and indigenous people face today. The Corporación strives to maintain the relevance of the site across generations in the interest of continuing to champion human rights.

**TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE**

For the past decade, Sites of Conscience have also played an increasingly crucial role in transitional justice processes. In post-conflict regions, these sites are often trusted to address the needs of communities transitioning from conflict. Unlike more traditional and formal judicial mechanisms, Sites of Conscience focus on engaging the participation of local civil society organizations, survivors, and governments. Through memorialization programs, they create an inclusive, grassroots approach to history and memory, providing victims with the opportunity to take the lead in sharing their stories and unleashing the power of those narratives to heal. The Coalition’s [Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation](#) is a consortium of nine organizations that together serve as a new mechanism for multidisciplinary and integrated response to the transitional justice needs of societies emerging from periods of conflict and authoritarian rule.

Our Sri Lankan member, [Herstories](#), supports an oral history project called the "Herstories Archive." Between 2012 and 2013, the auto-ethnographic project collected 285

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*Herstories, a member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, collects auto-ethnographic oral histories from women in postwar Sri Lanka.*

*PHOTO COURTESY OF SHARNI JAYAWARDENA*
personal narratives of mothers from the north, south, and east of Sri Lanka. Through telling their stories, the women share their family histories, their experiences of civil war, and their hopes for the future. The project seeks to highlight women’s stories of resilience, courage, and hope, which are too often marginalized or left out of history. Through hand-written letters, photo essays, and videos, the archive recovers these lost accounts, thus challenging the idea of a single, dominant narrative in postwar Sri Lanka. In the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere, the Coalition’s work reminds us that history is made not of dust but of flesh and bone, presenting each of us with the opportunity to define what matters, what is essential to ensure a just and ethical future.

This issue of the Forum Journal provides many more examples of preservationists and social activists using the power of place and narrative to shine light on frequently overlooked histories. California’s Tule Lake National Monument is still being planned, but interpretation at the site—which, even among the camps that held Japanese Americans during World War II, was a disturbing, punitive “segregation center”—has already begun. Tours of the extant structures help visitors imagine the confinement, isolation, and social rejection that prisoners experienced there—a timely warning in the midst of the recent backlash against immigrants.

Meanwhile, the new National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., has assembled from scratch a collection of artifacts to “fill the silences” of American history. Using objects from the notorious Angola Prison in Louisiana, several of the museum’s exhibits trace a system of cruelty and control that, instead of ending with the abolition of slavery, has evolved into an epidemic of racist mass incarceration.

And in 2018 the last remaining building of what was once an extensive Chicago public housing complex will become the home of the National Public Housing Museum. Residents of public housing have been the driving force behind the museum since its inception, seeking an opportunity for accurate self-representation. The museum will feature narratives and artifacts from their lives, continuing to
provide a fuller picture of this diverse group not only to counter stereotypes but also to confront public policy failures in search of a better way forward.

The diversity of sites and institutions featured in this issue and the breadth of their work underscore the unique capacity of preservation to spur political and social change by reframing traditional narratives and evoking strong emotional responses. To that end, our work must authentically portray difficult histories, confront painful pasts, and amplify underrepresented stories. Every time we choose to record the story of a young refugee from Syria or help a victim of the war in South Sudan create a bodymap—a life-sized representation of a human body upon which survivors write and draw their experiences of trauma and conflict—we are reminding the world that the most vulnerable among us are the bearers of a unique and vital message about the disastrous consequences of injustice and the significance of the ongoing struggle for human rights. FJ

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TAKEAWAY

TAKEAWAY
The Stories We Collect: Promoting Housing as a Human Right at the National Public Housing Museum

LISA YUN LEE

Over the course of my last decade as a museum professional, I’ve heard intimate narratives that bear witness to an American history that is both brilliantly ambitious and deeply troubled—that includes, on the one hand, a democratic commitment to the public and common good and, on the other hand, dreams deferred. An elderly African American woman told me about five-year-old Eric Morse, who was dropped to his death from the 14th floor of the Ida B. Wells housing development on the South Side of Chicago. A Jewish Holocaust survivor described her beloved apartment in the Jane Addams Homes (JAH), where she had her first truly kosher kitchen, “never tainted by pork.” A retired Italian American repairman proudly described the many afternoons he spent fixing elevators intentionally broken by gang members at Cabrini Green Homes on the Near North Side of Chicago—and how he eventually befriended and mentored those same young men. An African American community activist was excited to share that she was the first baby born in a 1960s public health midwifery program that encouraged natural childbirth in public housing communities.

These stories and others like them are the foundation of the National Public Housing Museum’s (NPHM) exhibitions and programs. Such oral histories are among the most important artifacts in our
collection, which will soon be housed and interpreted within our largest artifact—the last remaining building of the JAH, located on the Near West Side of Chicago.

THE ORIGINS OF THE NPHM

After a decade-long process of what at times seemed to be insurmountable obstacles—including economic difficulties as well as ideological, political, and cultural challenges—the NPHM is finally slated to open at the end of 2018. While there have always been enthusiastic supporters of the NPHM, many others questioned the need for a museum that would be telling the stories of “poor, black, welfare mothers.” Still others believed that the money would be better spent on building more public housing. But it is the public housing residents who have always been at the core of the organization and whose inextinguishable dreams have kept alive the belief that the museum would eventually open. Lead by the indefatigable Commissioner Deverra Beverly, a founding board member of our institution, residents insisted on a museum that would preserve and tell their stories, particularly after a devastating period of urban renewal that dramatically erased many of their homes from the urban landscape.

At one point, the JAH consisted of 32 buildings, with more than 987 apartment units and 52 row houses. John Holabird headed the team of architects who designed the complex as a 1938 demonstration project under the Public Works Administration, intended to showcase visionary public housing ideas. The welcoming village of linked three-story brick buildings featured a beautiful “Animal Court” playground with concrete sculptures of dogs, peacocks, pumas, and other animals made by renowned Chicago artist Edgar Miller. The JAH provided a convivial home for tens of thousands of racially diverse working-class residents who were
chronically under- or unemployed. But the facility endured decades of escalating problems, including neglect and disrepair, gang and drug violence, and ill effects from gentrification. In 2000 the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) launched the “Plan for Transformation,” an ambitious effort to revitalize the city’s deteriorating public housing projects. The plan’s stated aims included building and strengthening communities by integrating public housing and its leaseholders into the larger social, economic, and physical fabric of Chicago.

Many advocates saw demolishing decrepit and dangerous housing stock in Chicago and replacing it with new mixed-income homes not only as necessary but also as an opportunity to encourage racial and class integration in one of the most highly segregated cities in the United States. For others, however, the plan—which sought to demolish 25,000 units of housing and 11 high-rise public housing developments, displacing thousands of families without any guarantee of an affordable replacement—seemed to extend the intentional neglect that the city’s most vulnerable citizens had already been suffering for decades. Many saw it as part of an effort to forcibly remove African Americans from targeted neighborhoods. As James Baldwin plainly and provocatively stated, “Urban renewal... means negro removal.”
It was during this period that public housing residents mobilized and organized to save one particular building in the JAH from demolition in order to create the NPHM. They profoundly understood the power of place and representation, tenaciously demanding a museum that would serve as a visible reminder of the history of public housing. They understood how a cultural institution might be a site for resistance against erasure and forgetting. They felt that there was an important role for a museum—one in which they could control the narrative—in their struggle for self-determination.

**A MUSEUM IN THE STREETS**

Due to a long and deeply racialized history, public housing and the people who live there have been represented in the popular imagination as an undifferentiated mass of poor black folk, regarded with deep suspicion and resentment. More than 40 years ago, at a campaign rally in 1976, Ronald Reagan introduced the term “welfare queen” into the public conversation about poverty, and this pernicious caricature has persisted. The mythical figure of someone living large and benefitting from government handouts has frequently eclipsed the glaring reality of actual families deeply in need of support, living in poverty due to misfortune, the injustices of capitalism, and the long-term effects of racism and the legacy of slavery.

An important part of the work of the NPHM is to counter the problematic narratives about public housing residents with more complicated ones that speak to the great diversity and daily reality of the people who have lived in public housing across our nation. During our decade without a dedicated building—we called ourselves a “museum in the streets”—we curated several exhibitions (*History Coming Home* and *The Sound, The Soul, The Syncopation: Experience the Music of Public Housing*) and presented many public programs intended to overturn long-held assumptions about public housing and its residents. I sometimes refer to this as the “I bet you didn’t know” period. We celebrated the great diversity of people living in public housing: “I bet you didn’t know that white people made up the majority of public housing residents in the
Jane Addams Homes when they first opened.” We also included plenty of stories of successful businessmen, sports icons, politicians, artists, and musicians who had grown up in and benefited from public housing: “I bet you didn’t know that Goldman Sachs CEO and chairman Lloyd Blankfein, President Jimmy Carter, NBA superstar Tony Allen, or Grammy and Academy Award winner Barbara Streisand all once lived in public housing.”

It’s hard to identify exactly when it happened, but at some point in this decade we may have overcorrected. Although the museum won the hearts, compassion, and support of the general public, several long-time housing advocates, activist journalists, and scholars became wary of our mission, concerned that a whitewashed presentation of the uplifting public housing stories would eclipse the critical and painful stories that also needed to be told.

But telling painful truths is challenging. It is important to present difficult stories of neglect, violence, and abandonment—which are all part of the troubling history of public housing—without caricature, without re-inscribing stereotypes, and without inviting the kind of poverty voyeurism that took place, for example, in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. In what became known as “disaster tourism,” buses drove gawking visitors through the Lower Ninth Ward to peer at the devastation and blight. Driven by profit and prioritizing consumption, this kind of poverty porn reduces poverty to observable suffering and allows visitors to conclude that it results simply from a lack of visible, material resources. While it may induce empathy, and even charity, it fails to educate the audience about the root cause of poverty—systemic social injustice—and thus misses the opportunity to build the kind of social consciousness that can spur activism.²

How, then, could the NPHM cultivate a space for curious and engaged museum visitors to understand public housing stories without fostering a fetishistic, voyeuristic attitude? How could we create narratives rooted in specificity and lived experience, narratives that represent residents in their full humanity—neither sugarcoated nor mired in misfortune?
INTERROGATING THE NARRATIVE

In addition to grappling with questions about how to interpret stories, and which stories to tell, I have also become increasingly concerned with why we tell stories—and just a little suspicious of the widespread embrace of storytelling in history museums. What makes a good, engaging story is not necessarily synonymous with what constitutes accurate history. Captivating stories rely on compelling subjects and gripping narratives with well-defined beginnings, middles, and ends; and they are most satisfying when there is development and progress. Through the formal demands of narrative structure, stories often erase ambiguities and contradictions, and reject elements that simply do not make sense. In literary theory, this is sometimes referred to as “the tyranny of narrative.” History, particularly this history of public housing, is made up of conflicting, complicated accounts that flout the rules of narrative. The characters are real people, sometimes sympathetic, but often not. Their actions are motivated by both systemic influences and personal choices, and it is often difficult to differentiate between the two. The powerful intersecting forces of race, gender, and class frequently preclude happy endings, and public policies that intrinsically impact the residents’ lives more often engender repetition and regression than anything that looks like narrative progression. Actual human lives rarely fit a traditional narrative mold, and at least in the case of public housing residents, manipulating the reality to fit the desired story amounts to an act of violence.

My interrogation of stories and storytelling is in the spirit of political theorist Antonio Gramsci’s famous dictum: “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.” The aphorism suggests that, while we should see the world as it is, and not as we want it to be, we must act on the belief that we are capable of changing it. As sites of informal education, museums should raise critical questions, even when there are no easy answers. Practicing this “pessimism of the intellect,” however, should not lead us to become passive or apathetic about preserving objects or creating programming that enacts positive change for our communities. Instead, it should encourage an “optimism of the will” that produces
creative engagement, unleashing our radical imaginations in the service of creating a more just world.

Elaine Heuman Gurian’s 2010 article “Museum as Soup Kitchen” is one of the foundational texts for museum professionals working to make our institutions relevant and impactful, and Gurian continues to be one of the most provocative voices calling for museums to realize their fullest potential as socially responsible spaces. This article explores the potential for museums to respond to economically and socially disadvantaged communities. Gurian describes how little has changed in most museums, even during periods of economic downturn that may be increasingly precarious for certain populations, and wonders how cultural institutions might incorporate a broader palette of social services that could make them more useful and relevant in times of urgent need. This, of course, challenges our traditional sense of museums as sites that primarily collect, preserve, and display objects, encouraging us to think more expansively about how these institutions might become more essential to the public. For Gurian, the central issue is existential, interrogating what it means to be a museum:

The question for us who work in and love museums is a definitional one. Given the current world economic crisis and the needs of the people in our communities, at what point do we begin to ask ourselves, “Is what we are contemplating doing—even though it’s consistent with our own institutional definition of museums—enough?” Or—if your museum chooses a more activist position—when are you forced to ask yourself the opposite question: “Is what we are doing no longer the business of museums?”

I enthusiastically embrace Gurian’s provocations and analysis. During my time at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, I helped start and run Re-Thinking Soup, a weekly soup kitchen and public program that fed both the literally hungry and the public’s appetite for community and knowledge about food justice. Not only did we serve meals but we also offered space for unions organizing for strikes and boycotts; declared ourselves a sanctuary space in solidarity with Flor Crisostomo, an immigrant who sought sanctuary
during a 2010 deportation crisis; and threw open our doors during brutally cold winters to offer homeless people daytime warmth and shelter. Engaging in these social struggles created opportunities for us to further research the history of our site and interpret our artifacts in new ways.

As the current director of the NPHM, I intend to ensure that the museum is a socially responsible site, while always keeping Gramsci’s aphorism in mind. To that end, we must include a nuanced analysis of when museum programs and projects that provide services and resources become part of the problem by making the state increasingly less responsible for providing for the basic human needs of the public. It is important to consider how the museum’s efforts to become more relevant to the communities it serves might contribute to the forces of privatization that weaken the public sphere, undermine the idea of a common good, and absolve the state of accountability. We must reimagine our exhibitions and programs as acts of resistance against these forces and turn our attention to making more, rather than fewer, demands of the state.

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

During the 1970s the disability rights movement adopted the slogan “Nothing about us without us!” to communicate that no policy should be decided without the full and direct participation of the group(s) affected by that policy. We have adopted this motto as part of our understanding of the work of the NPHM. While we were always committed to keeping public housing residents as a moral compass at the center of our organization, we were not always certain whether and how to enter the arena of public policy around fair and equitable housing.

Public housing residents have shared a deep reservoir of knowledge with us, providing insight at every turn, and we know that we must continually challenge ourselves to remain relevant to their community. We push ourselves to use residents’ stories in order to bridge our work as an arts and cultural institution with the work of advocacy around housing as a human right. For example, we recently used an oral history workshop offered through the University of Chicago. Dr. Charlie Barlow, NPHM board member
and professor at the university, trained an undergraduate public policy class to gather stories about housing voucher use, previously called “Section 8 policy.” These stories will be used to educate residents about their rights and to reimagine a more inclusive and fair voucher system, addressing both the CHA and landlords across the city.

Our commitment to preservation and interpretation must always include a commitment not only to telling a narrative or presenting a counter-narrative but also to meaningfully empowering people to change the narrative. I remember a time, not so long ago, when taking on this kind of advocacy was contentious and incited protest from board members who imagined that a museum could and should be objective and provide space for “all sides” of an issue. However, at our most recent meeting, the board embraced and adapted our mission to include efforts to “preserve, promote, and propel housing as a human right.” The NPHM has had a luxuriously unhurried planning process that has included collective imagining, discussion, and building partnerships with activists across the country. Over the course of creating this new cultural institution, the underlying vision, mission, and values have evolved to prioritize activism and advocacy. Bridging cultural work with policy reform will chart expansive new terrains for what it means to be a museum.

POETIC RUIN

The permanent core exhibitions in our space will be modeled on those of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in Manhattan. Ruth Abram, the brilliant activist turned historian who founded the Tenement Museum in 1988 and also established the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience in 1999, was an early and passionate advisor to the NPHM. And just as the Tenement Museum did, we began our

Pre-restoration interior at the National Public Housing Museum.
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL PUBLIC HOUSING MUSEUM
planning process by earnestly collecting oral histories from several generations of public housing residents to interpret their lives in the apartments, some of which we plan to renovate and restore. The beautiful restoration of two apartments will intentionally freeze particular historical moments in order to capture the aspirations and resilience of the public housing residents who lived there during particular periods of time.

But the first exhibit that visitors encounter will be quite different. Poetic Ruin preserves a sealed-off area of the building in the condition in which it was left. While the construction, preservation, and restoration of architecture has a prominent place in architectural discourse, its destruction is often omitted, in part because it is incompatible with the dominant ideals of “culture,” “civilization,” and “society.” Poetic Ruin intentionally presents the deterioration of public housing architecture and artifacts to portray the abandonment that is as much a part of architectural history as are the triumphant narratives of modernist skyscrapers and pristinely restored historic buildings. Through the exhibit, we refuse to contribute to the erasure of difficult race and class narratives. Elements salvaged from the original building include multilayered paint samples that speak both to the aesthetics and politics of the CHA and to residents’ efforts to make the space their own; an entrance intercom that indicates safety concerns in response to growing gang activity; radiators and trash chutes installed in response to resident advocacy for public works and heat as rights rather than privileges; and medicine cabinets that evoke both public health concerns and resident-driven initiatives for self-determination and well-being. A closet door artfully tells the story of the devastating effects of the Brooke Amendment on mainstream ideas of “welfare families.” The salvaged door will include this label on the outside:

*What role did closets like these play in shaping survival strategies for some families in public housing? Open the closet door to learn more.*

And this one on the inside:

*“On many occasions my dad, like other dads I knew in the projects, would hide in the closet when Chicago Housing*
Authority inspectors arrived, because we needed to pretend that we were a single-mother home in order to continue to get much needed assistance.” – J. Taylor, Chicago Public Housing Resident, 1970

The exhibit draws on the power of the space to provide visitors with historical context for the neglect of the buildings—including the dismantling of the welfare state and the abandonment of large-scale projects due to shifts in public policy—as well as for the stories of individual residents making these apartments their homes. Poetic Ruin allows us to preserve a dimension of the history of public housing that would be lost in a total restoration. By telling the story of renewal and neglect, we situate debates about poverty in the United States and public investment in housing infrastructure in a broad and nuanced social and historical context in order to communicate the urgency of the issues we seek to address and emphasize our commitment to the public good.

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Stories can create important sites of resistance. They are at the nexus of the personal and the political. Focusing too much on the personal can lead to myopia, an inability to see how larger structures of the economy and the state impact the realm of the individual and the family. And focusing too much on structures can lead to a neglect of the agency of the people who create policy and the specificity of influence on individuals. The museum can be a space that bridges the gap between the personal and larger public policy. We might imagine this space as “the social” and “the commons.” The social is a place where connections are forged across lines of difference, of resistance and struggle. It is the sphere in which claims against the political order are made in the name of justice. The museum, as a commons, is more than resistance against or a response to the forces of privatization. It is the space where we, through arts and culture, forge connections across difference to join the struggle for justice. At the NPHM, we ally ourselves with the radical dream of public housing and its potential to create deep-rooted communities, common history, and public good.
We seek to gather and present powerful stories that probe the systemic causes of poverty, acknowledge everyday struggles, advocate for social justice, illuminate the complexity and diversity of public housing residents, and celebrate their resilience and creativity and the joys of making a home in public housing. 

LISA YUN LEE is the director of the National Public Housing Museum.

1 John Holabird was a principal of the architectural firm co-founded by his father, William Holabird. Known as Holabird & Root after World War I, the firm is recognized for renowned Art Deco buildings, skyscrapers, and modern architecture—including the Palmolive Building, the Chicago Daily News Building, and the Chicago Board of Trade. Holabird is one of the firms contracted with the Chicago Housing Authority to help renovate the Jane Addams Homes for the National Public Housing Museum.


5 Written by Massachusetts Republican Senator Edward Brooke, the first African American to be elected to the U.S. Senate by popular vote, the Brooke Amendment was designed to protect the poorest residents from rental increases sought by cash-strapped local housing authorities, but the legislation had numerous unintended consequences. The amendment introduced income-based rents capped at 25 percent of a household’s wages, a common affordable housing benchmark. Families that earned more paid more, so rents on working-class households with the highest incomes increased, which pushed those families toward the private housing market. This further concentrated poverty in public housing, and since tenant rents typically funded repairs and maintenance, the decreased revenue led to deteriorating conditions.

In order to survive during tough economic times, two-parent families sometimes strategically posed as single-parent households to keep their rents low and receive other benefits.

TAKEAWAY

“The Right to the City,” a 2015 Forum Journal article by Jamie Kalven.

VIDEO

Watch Jamie Kalven speak at PastForward 2015.
Angola Prison: Collecting and Interpreting the Afterlives of Slavery in a National Museum

PAUL GARDULLO

“American History is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it,” James Baldwin wrote in 1963. That quote, penned the same year as the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham—and not long after multiple Freedom Riders were imprisoned in Parchman Farm, a Mississippi state prison that was born as a penal plantation in the aftermath of slavery—has served as my compass point for the nearly decade-long process of helping collect for and conceptualize the exhibitions that now make up the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC).

Chartered 40 years after Baldwin wrote those words, the NMAAHC began without a collection, a building, or a set of exhibition plans. Founding Director Lonnie Bunch’s vision called for the museum to articulate the American story for all people through the lens of African American history and culture. But what does it mean to create a national narrative from the experience of people whose equal rights within the nation have so often been deferred or denied? That challenge necessitated a level of truth-telling about issues of race, slavery, and oppression that has rarely, if ever, been found in our national institutions—despite those issues being central to the foundation and mainsprings of our nation’s economic, social, and political life for centuries.

Because the museum was founded with a mandate to build a foundational collection, it has embraced an expansive new vision of collecting, forcing us to rethink basic questions of museum work—provenance, cataloguing, curation, and preservation. This has also meant dealing with complex interpretive themes of violence and victimization, as well as humanity, creativity, and resilience in the face of oppression. In sum, over the course of a decade, the muse-
um’s most important work has become that of attempting to fill the silences of American history to which Baldwin referred, primarily by constructing a collection of materials that could provide evidence of and speak powerfully and directly to these themes.

**PRISON FARMS: AN “AFTERLIFE” OF SLAVERY**

One of the largest and most complex silences we addressed while conceptualizing and collecting for our inaugural exhibitions concerned slavery’s legacies or “afterlives.” This required both explicating a more comprehensive history of slavery and providing a more complex interrogation of the ways in which its influence continued and continue to shape our world. This entailed balancing stories of freedpeople’s success in building communities and institutions that gave material substance to legal emancipation against the tenuousness of black freedom and the persistence, reformulation, and resurgence of white supremacy and violence. A heinous but often overlooked example is the continuum of slavery to bonded labor and mass incarceration.

Following Emancipation, most Southern states sought new ways to revive systems of enslavement to control the labor of African Americans. One method was the convict-lease system, wherein African Americans arrested for petty crimes such as vagrancy or public disorder were leased by the state to private employers. Convict labor quickly became a substitute for slave labor, and once African Americans were brought into the system, it was nearly impossible for them to get out. Convict labor built railroads, graded roads, constructed factories, made turpentine, grew and harvested cotton and other crops, felled timber, and performed many other tasks in conditions that historian Douglas Blackmon has called “slavery by another name.” An exposé about convict labor in the late 19th century, which seems to have first appeared in the *New York Tribune* under the title “Slavery in Georgia,” stated that “the wretched creature is actually a slave, as much in 1883 as in 1860, only that he is worked by the State instead of an individual, and is watched by armed soldiers instead of overseers.”
The system seemed to collapse when reports surfaced of leased prisoners being routinely starved, beaten, and even killed. Multiple states, however, merely continued the practice by creating massive state-run prison farms without the leasing component, maintaining full control over prisoners and using captive labor to fill state coffers. Many such prison farms were founded on former slave plantations. The largest and longest-lasting of these plantation prisons, several of which are still operating today, were Mississippi’s Parchman Farm; Cummins State Farm in Arkansas; Jester Prison Farm and Central State (“Sugar Land”) Prison in Texas; and the Louisiana State Penitentiary, otherwise known as Angola.

While scholarship that traces this history is at least a generation old, it—like much academic work about slavery and its afterlives—is not well known among the general public. A resurgence of sophisticated and well-researched but popular books, projects, and documentaries—most recently Ava DuVernay’s film 13th—is bringing this history to light. Nonetheless, articulating the complex trajectory from slavery to mass incarceration in a museum setting is not a simple or straightforward task. We at NMAAHCP decided to explore that continuum through the story of a particular place.

The largest and perhaps most notorious American penal plantation, Angola is thought to be named for the origins of those once enslaved there. Isaac Franklin, one of the largest slave traders in American history, and his partner, John Armfield, made millions by trafficking thousands of African Americans in the domestic slave trade from Alexandria, Virginia, to Natchez, Mississippi, where Franklin owned the plantations that would become Angola.

Following the sale of Franklin’s former plantations in 1880 and their subsequent transferal to the state of Louisiana, the prison developed as a constellation of inmate camps spreading across the landscape. The first of these, Camp A, was constructed in the late 19th century on what are believed to have been former slave quarters. At the dawn of the 20th century—on January 1, 1901—Louisiana ended the lease system and recommenced state control of prisoners. Over the next two decades, the state expanded the series of camps, keeping Camp A intact. It was reconstructed and
expanded in the late 1930s to include three dormitories and a disciplinary segregated cellblock known as “the dungeons,” which was demolished in 1955. No longer in regular use, the camp sometimes houses overflow populations of prisoners during natural disasters, such as during Hurricane Katrina.

Among the largest prisons in the United States, for most of its history Angola has also been known as one of the harshest and most inhumane. It remains a working plantation to this day, and while it has been making efforts since the 1970s to recast itself as a more humane penal institution with a full slate of modern rehabilitative programs, critics inside and outside the prison say that it is still in need of significant reforms. More than 6,000 people are incarcerated there, in a compound roughly the size of Manhattan, tucked within a bend in the Mississippi River. The great majority of inmates are African Americans serving life sentences, and most will die there.

DISPLAYING AND INTERPRETING ANGOLA PRISON IN THE MUSEUM
Between 2010 and 2015, I led the effort to collect two key structures from Angola: a guard tower built sometime in the 1930s or 1940s and a jail cell from Camp A. Through these objects, now installed in different exhibitions within the museum, we ask visitors to grapple with the power and depth of a particular place and its connection to the legacy of slavery in America.

Slavery and Freedom, the first of the NMAAHC’s three exhibitions that trace a chronology of history from the
15th century to the 21st, introduces visitors to both the breadth and depth of the domestic slave trade, which forcibly moved more than 1 million enslaved African Americans from the upper South to the Deep South and West. The exhibition juxtaposes the massive wealth generated by the domestic slave trade against its brutal inhumanity through stories of individuals who struggled to keep themselves whole amidst the heartache and dehumanization of being split from their families and loved ones, sold and resold as commodities in a vast economic engine. A central object that captures both the cold calculation and the human cost is a manifest that lists the names of the people transported as cargo on the Franklin and Armfield slavership that sailed from Virginia to Louisiana.

In the subsequent exhibition about the era of segregation, visitors encounter the iconic Angola guard tower. From its elevated platform—21 feet high—guards watched over inmates on the same land where Franklin had previously enslaved thousands. The tower evokes not only surveillance, power, control, and incarceration in the context of the mid-20th century but also the long and embedded roots of white supremacy, tracing back to conditions created under the system of slavery. Displayed near a large segregated railcar from Southern Railway and Emmett Till’s casket, along with the history of his life and murder, the tower contributes to narratives not just of the prison landscape but of the coercion and violence enacted upon black bodies in multiple contexts.

The Camp A cell, meanwhile, is displayed within a thematic exhibition called Power of Place, which focuses on the importance of different spaces and places in African American history and culture across a wide geography. The cell bar structure, sink and toilet, and metal bunk bed frame that the museum collected date back...
to a 1972 renovation of Camp A that left cells measuring 6’7” x 7’–7.5” x 7’8”.

Near the cell, a short film tells the long history and development of Angola prison from slave plantation to its present incarnation as a working prison farm—one that holds more prisoners than any other correctional facility in the United States and where 75 percent of the inmates are African American. Tracking both the brutal history of Angola and the halting, contested, controversial, and sometimes significant reforms that have, over more recent decades, brought it in line with prisons as rehabilitative institutions, the film provides a meditation on how deeply the structure of the plantation and its racial attitudes have shaped and continue to shape Angola, not just in its physical environment but in its relationships and culture. It also shows visitors how prisoners have continued to seek ways out of no way, sometimes finding justice, education, community, redemption, and freedom of expression in the worst of conditions.

Although—in response to both struggles within the prison population and outside pressure—the brutality and racist attitudes of the past have evolved over time, reformers both inside and outside of the prison continue to push for basic human rights. In a country with the world’s highest incarceration rate, where African Americans are imprisoned at more than five times the rate of white Americans, the persistence of Angola as a place that both changes and yet stays the same is a powerful testament to the continuum between slavery and incarceration. Its presence in the museum does not provide answers, but provokes questions about slavery and its legacies; about crime and punishment; about compassion, empathy, and redemption; and about the power of race in America.

CONTINUING TO COLLECT ANGOLA

As part of the process of constructing the collections, exhibitions, and building itself, the NMAAHC has found that collecting only the built environment of the carceral landscape, no matter how powerful, is incomplete—akin to collecting the history of slavery by focusing only on the instruments of restraint and control. We’ve therefore committed to a wider, though incipient, collecting effort
focused on those who have been imprisoned at Angola. We’re working with Wilbert Rideau, former prisoner and founding editor of the *Angolite* newspaper— the first and, perhaps, only instance in American history of free and uncensored press in prison—to develop a collection of materials closely related to his 20-year tenure as editor. The Rideau collection, which includes materials from the *Angolite* as well as Mr. Rideau’s Polk Award for journalism, helps us think about the role of free press in prison reform, about the possibilities of personal rehabilitation, and about the human condition more broadly.

The museum has also collected the first oral history interviews given by Albert Woodfox, a member of the “Angola Three.” These three former inmates—Robert King, Albert Woodfox, and Herman Wallace—were originally imprisoned for armed robbery but later placed in solitary confinement in April 1972, accused of killing a corrections officer. It has long been claimed that this charge was concocted as retaliation for the trio’s political organizing through a Black Panther Party chapter at Angola. Woodfox himself maintains that, “our political activities marked us, and that’s why they locked us up in solitary confinement, where I remained.”

On November 20, 2014, the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned Woodfox’s murder conviction, and in April 2015, his lawyer applied for an unconditional writ for his release, which was granted on February 19, 2016. Woodfox was the last member of the Angola Three to be released from prison, where he served the world’s longest term in solitary confinement. We hope that collecting his
oral history, along with his prison-issued clothing, will allow the museum to shed light on his unique personal experience as well as on the brutality of solitary confinement.

By documenting and humanizing the incarcerated, illustrating the value of a free press in prisons, and focusing on prison programs such as the Angola hospice, we ultimately hope to depict Angola as a complex world for those who work and are incarcerated there, with a network of cultures and human relationships inflected by race and systems of power and control. If we are to tell a fuller story of Angola—as a place and as an exemplar of broader narratives about incarceration, race, and the human condition—we need to collect documents, ephemera, film, photographs, and other objects that illuminate the perspectives of those who populate that world.

THE SILENCES THAT STILL REMAIN
Unlike Alcatraz, Eastern State Penitentiary, or other decommissioned prisons that can serve as interpretive sites of the past, Angola is still fully functioning. How can interpretations of its history connect Angola’s past to its present struggles for human rights and reform? What does it mean to preserve this place, and how might we preserve and interpret sites of conscience in a place that is still ground zero for such struggles?

Angola has made some strides toward reckoning with and interpreting its dark and brutal past. The prison’s donation of structures to the NMAAHC has allowed us to tell a story never before told in a national museum. There have also been efforts to recognize and preserve in situ: one of Angola’s original and horrifically inhumane cell blocks, “Red Hat,” was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 2003. And by maintaining former structures of oppression and state-sponsored terror as part of its landscape, the prison allows for the possibility of further interpretation. But the prison’s tentative strides toward preserving and displaying its past have been clouded by marketing that sensationalizes and encourages dark tourism, ignoring or censoring connections to present conditions. Angola does also have a prison museum—one
that operates under the aegis of the Board of Corrections of the State of Louisiana and is currently seeking accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums.

In order to provide more truthful, scholarly, and accurate accounts of the continuum between slavery and incarceration—or even to recount the histories of prisons—it can at times be necessary to either remove items from their contexts and environments or push for better preservation and interpretation in situ. The NMAAHC has thus far focused on transporting the story of Angola from its landscape in order to better contextualize it and thus fill some of the silences of American history. We must also pay attention to the silences that still remain. FJ

Paul Gardullo is a curator at the National Museum of African American History and Culture and director of the museum’s Center for the Study of Global Slavery.

**TAKEAWAY**
Read “From Memory to Action: A Toolkit for Memorialization in Post-Conflict Societies.”

**TAKEAWAY**

**VIDEO**
The Community Proposal to Save Shockoe Bottom

ROBERT NIEWEG

Historic Shockoe Bottom in downtown Richmond, Virginia, was once a major center of the nation’s slave trade and a place of terrible cruelty. Today it is a forbidding zone of blighted parking lots that conceal significant archaeological resources as well as painful stories that are essential to our shared heritage. For some, however, Shockoe is mere real estate, ripe for redevelopment. For others, especially in the African American community, Shockoe Bottom is a sacred place and a hallowed burial ground that must be treated with care as a Site of Conscience.

Preservation is an urgent matter for Shockoe. The only archaeological site there that has been properly investigated is Lumpkin’s Slave Jail, or the “Devil’s Half Acre,” which was just one cog in Richmond’s industrial-scale market for human flesh. The city’s Slave Trail Commission, which has made great strides to tell its slave history, proposes to construct a museum atop the excavated 1.7-acre site.

In 2015 social justice and historic preservation activists stopped a politically popular but deeply flawed proposal for a baseball stadium that would have devastated Shockoe’s archaeology and heritage. With our allies, the National Trust for Historic Preservation intervened to help save Shockoe through our 11 Most Endangered, National Treasure, and Preservation Fund programs. When the stadium plan was finally withdrawn in 2016, we turned our efforts to promoting a community-generated proposal to create a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park, conceived as a transformative place for learning, contemplation, and reconciliation.

The National Trust has pursued these advocacy campaigns—first against the stadium and now for the memorial park—with an alliance of individuals and groups led by, among others:

Ana Edwards of the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality;
Elizabeth Kostelny of Preservation Virginia; and Max Page of the Center for Design Engagement at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (C*DE).

Preservation Virginia is an esteemed longtime partner of the National Trust. The Sacred Ground Project and C*DE are valued new allies. Each organization has brought its own perspectives and assets to our joint advocacy. We engaged these three leaders in a conversation about Shockoe Bottom, our advocacy campaigns, and the future of the site.

What is the special significance of Shockoe Bottom for your organization? Why did your organization choose to become involved in advocacy for Shockoe Bottom?

Ana Edwards: In the three decades before slavery ended in 1865, between 300,000 and 350,000 people of African descent were sold out of Virginia to the cotton, sugarcane, and rice plantations of the Deep South. Richmond’s Shockoe Bottom district was the second-largest slave-trading market north of New Orleans.
The Defenders have been working in Richmond since 2002, when we held a forum about Gabriel’s Rebellion, a large revolt that Gabriel, an enslaved blacksmith, planned but was not able to realize before being found out and executed in 1800. We have since sought to memorialize Gabriel—a hero from black Richmond’s own ranks, struggling for liberation from within the bounds of slavery and repression—and bring his story to light. On October 10, 2003, we launched the Gabriel Forum, an annual commemoration on the anniversary of his death. In 2004 we led a campaign to install a historical highway marker near the town gallows in Shockoe, where Gabriel was executed. We also initiated the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project to recognize the African Burial Ground (where the gallows once stood), which was closed in 1816 and covered by layers of urban development culminating in an interstate highway and a parking lot. The true scope of the slave trade in Richmond can only be understood by memorializing this burial ground and the other significant resources in Shockoe Bottom, thereby enhancing their value as historic sites and destinations for historic tourism—ones that are especially, though not exclusively, important for the African American community.

Elizabeth Kostelny: Although it had gone largely unrecognized until recently, Shockoe is important to our understanding of American history. As the center of Richmond’s slave trade, this place tells a complex and interconnected story that remains relevant today. Acknowledging this history, which has been covered over both literally and figuratively, and honoring this place are important to Preservation Virginia. It is overdue, yet still very timely.

In 2014 Preservation Virginia nominated Shockoe Bottom to the National Trust’s 11 Most Endangered program and listed the site as one of Virginia’s Most Endangered Historic Places. At the time, this site was threatened by the proposed construction of a baseball stadium that would have obliterated the archaeological remains. With representatives from the National Trust, the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, and other groups, we successfully organized to demonstrate the merit of an alternate plan to make Shockoe Bottom a place of education, memorialization, and healing.
Max Page: C*DE is dedicated to bringing the histories, stories, and design needs of underrepresented groups into the public conversation. Having told many important and difficult stories in Holyoke, Massachusetts, where we are based, we were naturally drawn to Richmond. We sought to help coordinate a rich community conversation there as well as to develop designs that would answer the community’s needs not only for a memorial park but also for new institutions to advance economic well-being, especially among those left out of Richmond’s prosperity.

In your organization’s view, why wasn’t the proposed baseball stadium an appropriate neighbor in Shockoe Bottom? What specifically did we do right as advocates to defeat the stadium proposal? What was the key to this win?

Edwards: The baseball stadium was simply the wrong project for Shockoe Bottom—there are far better opportunities for engagement in this historically significant neighborhood. The majority of black Americans today could trace some ancestry to Shockoe Bottom, which gives it the potential to be one of the most compelling historic tourism destinations in the entire country. African American tourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry, as evidenced by the fact that there are now more than 150 black heritage museums operating in 37 states. Virtually every other city once associated with the slave trade has developed a museum dedicated to that history. In fact, Charleston, South Carolina, which already has one museum exploring this past, is now raising $75 million for an International African American Museum. Scheduled to open in 2017, it will seek “to re-center South Carolina’s place in global history, illuminating its pivotal role in the development of the international slave trade and the Civil War.” But Richmond—which, given its role in the 19th-century domestic slave trade, arguably has the greatest claim to this history—has neglected its past.

Kostelny: Buried under the asphalt, the archaeological remains of the former streets and buildings of Shockoe Bottom still await discovery and study. Uncovering that history will provide new insights into the people who lived, worked, and passed through this marketplace. The baseball proposal would have destroyed that history, burying it one more time. We believe that there are more
appropriate ways to grow this area, developing the economy and creating jobs while still recognizing its history.

Advocates pointed to the lack of transparency in the baseball stadium plan and put forward alternatives that would both preserve the site and provide economic opportunities. More than that, we were able to raise awareness of Shockoe Bottom’s importance and advance a plan that recognizes the shared nature of its history. The national recognition of the site created steady pressure on decision-makers and convinced them that moving forward with construction of the stadium would cause serious harm.

Page: No one is against economic development in Shockoe Bottom, but sufficient space must be set aside to capture its historic resources, many of which are currently hidden below the surface. While the baseball stadium would have saved Lumpkin’s Jail, it would have wiped away so many of the area’s other historic resources—including archaeological remains of factories, jails, and slave market buildings.

The key to the victory was the persistent, vocal, and very public condemnation of the stadium plan. Having the support of the National Trust helped turn a local struggle into what it deserved to be—a national campaign for the protection and interpretation of a place of national significance.

Together, we are promoting a new, community-generated proposal for a memorial park. Why does your organization think that the memorial park is the best solution for Shockoe Bottom? How does the proposal achieve your organization’s goals?

Edwards: Shockoe Bottom’s features are unique and irrecoverable if lost, and its core is a highly significant archaeological, historical, and cultural site with essential connections to the African Diaspora, the domestic trade in enslaved Africans, and the origins of the city of Richmond. It can be transformed to serve the public through commemoration, education, and artistic expression, and its future development should blend respectful commemoration of this country’s history of slavery, cultural heritage tourism, and economic opportunity.

The memorial park proposal encompasses several practical and visionary recommendations: Secure nine acres of land at the heart
of Shockoe, most of which are already owned by the city, and protect them with zoning ordinances tied to historic district guidelines. Make the foundational design of the park beautiful and powerful, and people will come. Develop its resources in phases, starting with key features that will make it visible, logically integrated into the surrounding historic neighborhood, and programmatically connected to the city’s existing historic institutions. Showcase its educational potential. And ensure ongoing community engagement with the site’s development and programming.

**Kostelny:** On a practical level, we understand the realities of financially sustaining historic sites. As designed, the memorial park would create open spaces, gathering areas, and engaging interactive opportunities for learning and memorialization. It complements the conceptual plans for the Lumpkin’s Jail museum complex and provides a context in which to imagine the massive commercial area that once teemed with businesses—some that traded in goods, others in human lives. At the same time, the memorial park would allow for appropriate development that can revitalize this area, providing jobs and training opportunities for Richmond residents. We also understand the need for an archaeological investigation of the area and, from our experience at [Historic Jamestowne](#), know that archaeological investigation can enhance the understanding of a place. By combining all these elements, we believe that the memorial park would attract diverse support, participation, and financing.

Shockoe Bottom was once an active and bustling city center, and the memorial park concept can infuse it with renewed purpose.
and vitality. Through archaeological research, education programs, events, markers, and public interactions, it can become a place to learn about the history of the slave trade, commemorate the people it harmed, and share a path forward through acknowledgement and reconciliation. Places like Shockoe Bottom allow us to move forward, strengthened by having confronted the realities of history and learned from the perseverance of those who came before us.

**Page:** C*DE believes in the memorial park idea in no small part because, across a series of meetings with a broad range of stakeholders, it emerged as the best solution. This project must come from the community, particularly the African American community. Richmond needed a proposal that residents—black and white—could support for its capacity to showcase a truly mature, confident city willing to fully confront its past. The memorial park would be a powerful symbol of the once-capital of the Confederacy now openly exploring its past and celebrating the multiracial city. C*DE was proud to be able to take the initial vision further and give it more detail as well as visual and rhetorical justification.

**Why is it important for the African American community to play a central role in designing and operating the memorial park? What role did the African American community play in creating the park concept?**

**Edwards:** Slavery ended more than 151 years ago, but systemic racism was just getting started. Driving around Richmond, you can see whose values have been honored up to this point, whose images have represented “us” to the world. It’s just not enough. Black people have the right to know their own history, to tell it, and to decide how it is represented.

Our country’s role in perpetuating a system and public landscapes built to sustain white supremacy is no longer the hushed talk of old white power brokers; it’s the talk in the streets and is now being openly challenged. “Black lives matter” is a simple statement made in opposition to a people’s literal devaluation. African Americans’ insistence that sites related to their history matter is an active rebuttal of that devaluation.
The African American community voice was always at the heart of the campaign to reclaim the Shockoe Bottom sites. The proposal was developed and vetted in public—through community meetings and protests; petitions, media programming, and reporting; and lectures and presentations in public schools, universities, and conferences—as well as at city hall.

Kostelny: The involvement of the African American community is essential to the success of the memorial park. For far too long, the history of Shockoe Bottom has been ignored and covered over, and ensuring that the African American community feels true investment in this site is essential to its future.

Page: This program must be led by African Americans, with white allies lining up to help. The story of this place is fundamentally that of enslaved people who fought back, resisted, endured, and maintained their dignity amidst a harsh, dehumanizing system. The Defenders and their allies have been uncovering that history for years and presenting it to Richmond’s citizens and civic leaders.
as a steady, gentle but persistent challenge to the city’s image of itself. The struggle in Shockoe Bottom is connected to a century of African Americans’ efforts to tell their history and to demand that the white-majority world acknowledge it. The fact that support for this effort has been growing is no doubt connected to the national Black Lives Matter movement, which has spurred calls for more dialogue and reparation.

**Following the November 2016 election, when Richmond voters elected Mayor Levar Stoney and three new city council members, what is the most important next step in the community’s campaign to promote the memorial park proposal? What is your message to Richmond’s new mayor and city council?**

**Edwards:** We have a chance to rebuild trust between our elected officials and the people they represent and to demonstrate the good work that can be done when such trust is based on the truth of shared experience. Let’s move forward with the memorial park. Let’s design it so that the Lumpkin’s Jail museum is actually the seed project in a greater plan that memorializes sites like the African Burial Ground as places of unique and powerful resonance for all. Let’s commit to this for the long haul, do it well, and do it together because, while it won’t be easy, it will matter.

**Kostelny:** The memorial park proposal comes out of a community-based approach and reflects real opportunities for sharing this history. The conceptual design of the park supports the Lumpkin’s Jail museum plan and should not be viewed as competitive or in conflict. Incorporating the two proposals offers an opportunity for a stronger historic destination. The memorial park will become a place that people frequent regularly, and it will be able to support events and activities that strengthen the community.

**Page:** We believe that the new mayor should hit the reset button and call all stakeholders together for a conversation about how the Lumpkin’s Jail site museum project can and must be a part of the memorial park project. Memorial park advocates are not opposed to the museum as part of a comprehensive plan for Shockoe Bottom. But those who have pushed exclusively for the Lumpkin’s project must embrace the idea that these are complementary, not oppositional, projects.
As of spring 2017, the city of Richmond’s architectural consultant, SmithGroupJJR, is designing a museum for the Lumpkin’s Slave Jail archaeological site. Richmond residents are speaking up at SmithGroup’s public meetings, calling on the city to consider the proposed Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park alongside the Lumpkin’s museum.

However, another challenge is on the horizon: expansion of Shockoe’s Main Street Station to accommodate a proposed high-speed railroad facility. If the federally funded railroad project is built, it could overwhelm the neighborhood and preclude commemoration of Richmond’s slave history. On the other hand, if designed well, the rail project could spark equitable redevelopment and much-needed economic activity that would be compatible with the memorial park. Only the public’s continuing vigilance will ensure a good result.

As an active participant in shaping Shockoe’s future, the National Trust affirms the value of an interpretive center atop the Lumpkin’s Slave Jail site as well as the community-generated memorial park proposal. Both are in the public interest. To that end, we support a community-driven comprehensive plan for Shockoe Bottom that would incorporate archaeological investigation, heritage tourism planning, and sustainable economic redevelopment that is aligned with the city’s own revitalization strategy. FJ

ROBERT NIEWEG is the senior field director and attorney for the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
Tule Lake: Learning from Places of Exception in a Climate of Fear

CATHLIN GOULDING

On a stretch of highway near the California-Oregon border sits a tract of land that, at one time, held a small city of prisoners. On both sides of the asphalt, mint and potato crops grow in green, leafy grids. Small houses, painted in white and blue, sit adjacent to neat stacks of hay. In the distance, Mount Shasta rests in chalky white, upstaged only by a craggy peak where the Modoc Indians once rowed their boats and carved their messages into the rock. On a clear day, a tiny white cross is faintly visible at the top of this peak. Nearby, Captain Jack’s Stronghold, a restaurant that takes its name from an Indian warrior who resisted forced removal by the U.S. Army, is one of the few eateries in the area.

It would be easy for the casual traveler to miss the intermittent signs on the road, one of them indicating that the Tule Lake World War II Segregation Center lies ahead. The turn-off, a county road, leads to a fenced area covered by sagebrush and yellowing dry grass. A low concrete bunker with boarded-up windows stands in the center of a field, covered by a metal tent-like structure. The building is one of the few lasting material indicators that a concentration camp, with rows of brown, military-style barracks reaching into the bluffs in desolate similitude, once existed here. One of the 10 Japanese American concentration camps that dotted the west-
ern and southern United States during the World War II, Tule Lake had a special status as a maximum security “segregation center.”

In 1943 the War Relocation Authority (WRA), the bureaucratic body that managed the forced removal and mass imprisonment of Japanese Americans, issued a questionnaire to all 110,000 incarcerated people. Widely termed the “Loyalty Questionnaire,” two of the questions were “Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty?” and “Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any and all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?” Individuals and families deliberated at length, agonizing over the wording of the questions and potential implications of their answers. For first-generation Japanese Americans—the Issei—the question about forswearing allegiance to the Japanese emperor was especially fraught. Because they were denied naturalization under the exclusionary U.S. immigration policy, answering “no” might have left them stateless, without legal ties to either their native country or their adopted one.

A sizeable number of prisoners at Tule Lake answered “no” to one or both questions (or refrained from responding entirely) for myriad reasons that ran the gamut from political dissent to confusion and familial obligation. As a result, the prison was selected by the WRA to serve as a segregation center to detain so-called “disloyals” from across all 10 camps. In preparation for this influx of prisoners, the camp’s administration bolstered guard towers and police presence and added multiple security fences to the perimeter of the camp. The mood at Tule Lake was rife with tension and anxiety. Radicalized Japanese nationalist groups formed and demonstrated in the streets of the camp. Prisoners protested labor and living conditions. The administration instated martial law and routinely rounded up prisoners into smaller, makeshift prisons for arbitrary reasons. And, in perhaps the least-known aspect of Tule Lake’s history, approximately 5,500 prisoners renounced their American citizenship after a new federal bill offered them the
opportunity to voluntarily give up citizenship and return to Japan. The reasons for renunciation included pressures from pro-Japan factions in the camp, misleading rumors about the outcome of the war, fear of resettling in hostile communities, and acts of political dissension. In 1946, 1,116 of the prisoners who had renounced citizenship were deported to Japan. A large contingent of those who remained—realizing that their decision had been ill informed—applied for hearings to reinstate their citizenship, an effort led by American Civil Liberties Union lawyer Wayne Collins. Many of those who applied for reversals would remain stateless, designated as “Native American aliens,” until a court case restored their citizenship more than two decades after World War II.

Tule Lake was an experiment in systematic denaturalization and deportation. As historian Barbara Takei notes, it was “a chilling program” that has “received little critical scrutiny.” Imposing this framework of loyalty onto prisoners would have lasting consequences. Families were split up, prisoners suffered long-term emotional wounds from the stigma of being sent to the “troublemaker” camp, and political and personal rifts that developed between “loyal” and “disloyal” prisoners continued for decades.

TULE LAKE NATIONAL MONUMENT: RAISING ISSUES OF CONTINUING RELEVANCE
The campaign to memorialize Japanese internment camps was decades in the making, beginning with the Civil Rights-era activism of Japanese American college students, who sought to preserve the stories of the camps through multiple outlets—higher education
curricula, pilgrimages to former incarceration sites, and formal juridical processes. In 1988 President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, allotting $20,000 in reparations to each former prisoner. In the aftermath of this national recognition of wrongdoing, interest in camp pilgrimages proliferated and, simultaneously, so did political coalitions and grassroots advocacy for Tule Lake’s preservation.

In nominating it for landmark status, the National Park Service (NPS) argued that Tule Lake demonstrates a “political and cultural idea that that safety and security can be found only in segregation and confinement of those perceived to be dangerous mainly because they are ‘different.’” Moreover, the NPS stated, these kinds of extensions of power resurface “in spite of [their] inconsistency with important and basic American ideals stated in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.” Justification for Tule Lake’s landmark status, then, was grounded in how the site exposes the contradictions between stated democratic principles and acts of racialized exclusion and banishment. Despite the persuasive arguments for Tule Lake’s designation as a national historic monument, the designation and long-term preservation plans were met with some concerns. Some residents of the Tule Lake Basin not only feared governmental overreach but also believed longstanding myths and misunderstandings about the camp that had passed through generations—including the idea the camp had incarcerated “dangerous” prisoners of war. Ultimately, in order to realize landmark status, Tule Lake was grouped with a series of historic places affiliated with “World War II Valor in the Pacific,” mostly battlefield and military sites located in Hawaii’s Pearl Harbor, California, and Alaska’s Aleutian Islands. In 2008 President George W. Bush decreed Tule Lake a National Historic Monument.

The NPS has stewardship over a small portion of the historic camp—37 out of the original 6,110 acres. The rest of the land is now a mix of private and public property, including areas owned by the California Department of Transportation and the Federal Bureau of Recreation. Unique among all of the Japanese American camps, Tule Lake had an internal jail, as well as auxiliary
confinement structures, used to criminalize and detain Japanese American prisoners. These “jails within jails” are among the few buildings that remain open to the public via ranger-led tours. The site is not otherwise accessible to the public and does not yet have a permanent visitor center. Tule Lake is a park-in-the-making, currently running a series of public meetings in response to a recently released general management plan.

As part of its interpretative themes, the NPS asserts that Tule Lake “offers a compelling venue for engaging in a dialogue concerning racism and discrimination, war hysteria, failure of political leadership, and the fragility of democracy in times of crisis.” In our current political era, the Japanese incarceration has served as a historic touchstone—often a misguided one. In a December 2015 interview with Time magazine, President Donald Trump indicated that he was unsure whether he would have supported the camps. “I would have had to be there at the time to tell you, to give you a proper answer,” he said. “But you know war is tough,” he added. “And winning is tough. We don’t win anymore.” And in an interview on Megyn Kelly’s Fox News show, Trump supporter Carl Higbie suggested that the Japanese American prison camps might serve as a “precedent” for a registration of American Muslims. That the Japanese American incarceration frequently enters into the political discourse of late underlines this history’s unfortunate and continued relevance.

THE STATE OF EXCEPTION
What ties concentration camps, detention centers, temporary “holding” centers, and refugee camps together is a certain political logic. As we have often observed in times of terrorism, war, and crisis, populations deemed security threats to the state are targeted, stripped of certain rights and obligations, forcibly removed, and sequestered into isolated spaces. Within political and legal theory, this kind of climate is called a “state of exception,” a concept originally developed by Carl Schmitt, a German theorist who was grappling with the upheavals in Weimar Germany. Suspending the normal legal order that, in liberal democracies, ensures certain civil
rights and curbs executive authority creates a state of exception. An executive body folds new policies and practices into the legal order, often in the name of national security or emergency. Building on Schmitt’s thesis, contemporary political philosopher Giorgio Agamben argues that what were once “provisional” measures used to deal with immediate security threats “constitute today a permanent technology of government.” In other words, heightened security is no longer an unusual, temporary state of affairs—it has become thoroughly integrated into day-to-day life.

Tule Lake—a prison riddled by bureaucratic complications during World War II, the sequestering of “defiant” prisoners into spaces of confinement within the larger camp, and policies designed to further strip prisoners of their legal status—highlights a larger political phenomenon: the power of the state to determine who will be included in the polity and who must be excluded and removed. These non-citizens, whom Agamben identifies as the figures of homo sacer, are excluded from the life and protections of governance while, at the same time, remaining vulnerable to the rules and regulations of the state. The prisoners at Tule Lake and similar spaces of detention all occupy this ambiguous legal status.

PLACES OF EXCEPTION
Within a state of exception, concentration camps and other buildings play a central role in the exclusion and containment of a targeted population. These “places of exception” share specific types of architecture and spatial arrangements. Grids of barracks and cells facilitate surveillance; guard towers and centralized policing ensure that prisoners live in fear of being watched. Such places have often been situated in remote locations, away from view and scrutiny, and remained isolated and secreted from nearby communities. In the years after the material structures are disassembled, removed, and repurposed, the traces of the camps may remain in the form of foundations and ruins.

However, these places of exception can sometimes be transformed into places for teaching and learning about the history that transpired there. To enter and walk through these places—to
observe the contours of the landscape, to immerse oneself in the visceral feel of a prison camp, to learn the stories and memories of those who were incarcerated while traversing the actual site—is an act of learning about the state of exception. Elizabeth Ellsworth, a media studies professor at the New School, explains that such sites facilitate an “experience of the learning self” that puts “inner thoughts, feelings, memories, fears, desires, and ideas in relation to outside others, events, history, culture, and socially constructed ideas.” When such a confrontation happens, according to Ellsworth, places become pedagogy, a “force with its own logics, materials, forms, and processes aimed at reforming what we think we know.” How might an immersive experience, then, in a place of exception teach about the limits and precariousness of our democratic systems and the uncertain nature of citizenship?

EXPERIENCING THE SPACES AND SENSATIONS OF CONFINEMENT

When a place of exception becomes a place of learning, part of its power to teach is derived from its unique ability to convey the sensory experience of confinement. At Tule Lake, very few of the original structures of the camp are available for public viewing. Part of the challenge for the NPS is evoking the sensations of confinement in a landscape that has, for the most part, transformed.

On Saturday mornings, visitors congregate at the temporary NPS headquarters—the Tulelake-Butte Valley Fairgrounds about 11 miles away from the original prison. After a brief greeting and introductions, the participants drive their individual vehicles down the highway, turn onto a small county road, then head to the first stop down a narrow road adjacent to the runway of a small airport. Having parked their cars, each person climbs over a broken portion of a barbed wire fence, gathering around a concrete foundation. There is a series of equidistant holes in the concrete and wooden planks are scattered over it. Kenneth Duott, one of a handful of rangers who regularly lead these tours, explains that we are standing at what was the women’s latrine at Tule Lake.
The latrine is a curious artifact of Tule Lake’s history, serving as both a literal and conceptual entry point to the camp, a common denominator between visitors and the Japanese American prisoners. The holes in the concrete foundation mark the places where the toilets stood. They are close to one another and, as the ranger notes, there were no doors or stalls. As former prisoners have reported, women would place paper bags over their heads to give each other some semblance of privacy. Duott says that visitors identify with the latrine for reasons that might be expected—the protocols, the processes, and the awkwardness of sharing bathrooms with strangers. “That’s something that I really try to impress upon people: the desolate conditions, the difficult conditions, the lack of things that people would normally have had outside of these barbed wire fences,” explains Duott in an interview. The ruins provoke an empathic response from visitors, who can relate to the quotidian intimacies and vulnerabilities that play out in the public bathroom. But they also highlight the differences between the visitors’ own creature comforts and the public debasements that prisoners experienced daily. Seeing the latrine causes visitors to identify with the emotions and experiences of those who once inhabited this place.
The Tule Lake Jail is the second stop of the tour. The jail was constructed after Tule Lake became a segregation center to confine those whose answers on the loyalty questionnaire were unsatisfactory. While much remains unknown about their other uses, the jail and the adjacent stockade held “trouble-maker” prisoners—members of pro-Japan organizations, prisoners who protested labor conditions at the camp, and prisoners who were in various states of non-citizenship. The “jail-within-a-jail”—as the NPS staff call it—was a heightened incarceration space in which prisoners were held in a purgatory-like state, no longer belonging even to the larger prison population, to speak nothing of the world of citizens outside the camp. Since the end of World War II, the building passed between various municipal authorities, eventually ending up in the hands of the California Transit Authority and then, in 2008, under the stewardship of the NPS.

The ranger opens the metal gate at the entrance to the jail and takes a small group inside. The space is empty and dark, a welcome respite from the summer heat. The windows and doors are covered in boards—a local farmer removed the original metal bars, though he has since donated them back to the park service for re-installation. To the right of the entrance is a group of three cells, one of which is covered with a hanging screen featuring an enlarged, historic black-and-white photo of a man in a white undershirt. The man appears disoriented, and a blur of ghostly figures is visible in the cell behind him. The ranger leads visitors to the center cell, directing his flashlight to its wall, creating a circle of light around a faint, penciled scribbling: “SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME.” The phrase is taken from a 1920s Irving King song that was still popular during the war:

Show me the way to go home.
Everywhere that I roam.
Over land or sea or foam
You can always hear me singing this song
Show me the way to go home.

The ranger asks visitors to consider the meaning of “home” and to contemplate the questions raised by this faint inscription. Walking through the jail is an exercise in contrasts, prompting visitors to draw comparisons between the places where they feel most rooted and secure and the excision of these prisoners into spaces of little solace, in which their citizenship offered no protections. The sensations of confinement—the secluded nature of the cells, the hushed echoes, the ghostly presence of those who penciled song lyrics on the walls—are as essential to the learning experience as any historical record, interpretive panel, or photo. Thus, the place itself is essential to learning.

“UNSTICKING” THE PRESENT
On a July morning, a group of children gathered at the Tulelake Fairgrounds, in an area outside of the park service offices, where historic farm equipment is displayed next to the old barracks from Tule Lake. They are the children of farm workers, enrolled in a summer day program that takes care of them while their parents work nearby. An NPS staff member led them in an exercise, asking them to imagine that one day their parents announce that they are being told to pack up their things and leave their homes—and that they cannot come back. One boy, who had been bouncing up and down boisterously, was perplexed.

“But why?” he asked.

“You don’t know why. You are just told to leave,” she responded.

“But why?” the boy insists again, his face pinched in frustration.

The idea behind this activity is, of course, to put the children in the shoes of Japanese Americans in the aftermath of Executive Order 9066. Sometimes in the course of a week or two, with little idea of where they would end up, Japanese Americans sorted through their things and stuffed what they could into suitcases and canvas sacks. Some educators have concentrated on what people chose to bring when they left for the camps, thus running the risk
overemphasizing logistical questions about choosing between items. Structured educational experiences must attend to the boy’s unhappy echo of a deeply existential political question: “But why?”

This question gets at one of the most central issues that places like Tule Lake evoke for visitors: Why do we choose to remove and exclude those who we fear? And why do we do it over and over again? Tule Lake’s bearing on our present has a broad resonance. In the news cycle, we see images of Syrian refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos, settling into grids of tents for interminable periods. Off the coast of Australia, refugees or persons who have breached visa conditions are held in “processing centers” of green canvas tents and barbed wire fencing. In Texas the privately run Karnes County Residential Center detains those who crossed the U.S.-Mexico border seeking asylum. Though the euphemisms for these places range, they all have in common a political climate of fear, suspicion, and hysteria and a system of governance wherein power is ultimately rooted in the ability to decide who can and does belong.

University of Toronto education scholar Roger Simon explained that learning a troubling, difficult past unleashes “a potential force that might yet unstick the present from its seemingly necessary future, impelling us to see the work that still needs to be done today.”

Places like Tule Lake “unstick” our present, fostering thinking, feeling responses to the very structures and legal climates that make invasive national security measures permissible and possible. If we can, as a public, condition ourselves to small but necessary
daily work—intellectual debate, curiosity and concern about others, a willingness to engage with troubling knowledge—then we can begin to fashion communities of political consciousness and ethical responsibility that do not accept the state of exception as a foregone conclusion. FJ

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**TAKEAWAY**
Read resources suggested by the National Park Service.

**TAKEAWAY**

**TAKEAWAY**
Read “Valuing Diversity at Heart Mountain: Carrying the Lessons of Yesterday into Today,” a Forum Blog post by Brian Liesinger.

**TAKEAWAY**
Read the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience guidance on truth and justice.
The Fight to Save Blair Mountain

CHARLES B. KEENEY III

There is no piece of real estate in West Virginia more contested than the battlefield at Blair Mountain, the site of one of the largest—but also among the least widely known—armed uprisings in American history. The Battle of Blair Mountain, the culminating event of the West Virginia Mine Wars, took place in August 1921, when an estimated 10,000 miners, armed and wearing red bandanas around their necks, marched south from the state capital toward the anti-union counties of Logan, Mingo, and McDowell. They intended to force an end to the notorious Mine Guard System, which had enabled coal companies to rule the coalfields as a police state. As the miners marched south, company forces, led by Logan County Sheriff Don Chafin, set up 10 miles of defensive positions north of the town of Logan, along ridgelines stretching from Blair Mountain north to Mill Creek. The two forces fought for four days before federal troops intervened and the miners, unwilling to fight U.S. soldiers, laid down their arms. In the aftermath, more than 500 miners and their union leadership were arrested and charged with treason and murder. Among them was my great grandfather, Frank Keeney, then president of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in West Virginia, and one of the central figures of the Mine Wars.

The memorialization of the Battle of Blair Mountain has been, in some respects, every bit as contentious and complex as the event itself. The majority of the 1,669 acres of the battlefield are owned by large absentee landowner corporations such as Natural Resource Partners and United Affiliates, Inc.,

Blair Mountain.
PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL CORBIT BROWN
who lease the land to Arch Coal, Inc., and Alpha Natural Resources, respectively. These coal companies are pursuing the mining practice of mountaintop removal—blasting the tops of mountains in order to access the coal seams within. This would effectively erase the battlefield and undermine the efforts to memorialize the historic events of 1921. Given their history of conflict with the UMWA, it is not surprising that those landowning and coal companies have not emerged as champions of a monument to the battle.

Battlefields like Pearl Harbor or Antietam are often tied to patriotism and national identity. They tell stories of conflicts that have long since ended, their legacies typically enjoying a certain amount of stability in the national consciousness. By contrast, the battle at Blair Mountain was a conflict between laborers and industrialists over unionization and a lack of civil liberties in the coalfields. This conflict continues to the present day and raises questions about how to include labor history in the pantheon of our national identity.

BLAIR MOUNTAIN ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER

The Battle of Blair Mountain has remained shrouded in mystery partly because there has been no extensive written record of the fighting. To study Gettysburg or Yorktown, one can read diaries, soldiers’ letters, and official military correspondence to help reconstruct the event. This is not the case with Blair Mountain. The miners kept to a code of silence about the organization and specifics of the battle. After all, they were committing what some would call treason by taking up arms against the state. On the mine owners’ side, Don Chafin’s men kept out journalists and remained secretive about their tactics and strategies.¹ This lack of written record leaves a gap in the history, which naturally magnifies the significance of the battlefield. Only by preserving the site and conducting archaeological studies there can we truly know what happened. In 2006 Dr. Harvard Ayers of Appalachian State University and Logan County native Kenny King—and board member of preservation group Friends of Blair Mountain (FOBM)²—conducted a partial archaeological survey of those portions of the battlefield that were not leased by coal companies. They found dozens of
shell casings, entrenchments, and firearms used in the battle. Such findings can help scholars reconstruct troop movements, weapons used by each side, and the nature of the fighting. Ayers and King confirmed a high degree of integrity at the site and collected enough evidence to nominate the area for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.3

In March 2009 the battlefield was placed on the National Register. However, this listing was immediately challenged by the coal industry. According to King and state staff serving at the time, Don Blankenship, then the CEO of Massey Energy Company and the most powerful coal executive in the state, immediately threatened to personally sue each staff member of the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).4 Jackson & Kelly, Inc., a powerful law firm that often represents the coal industry, then petitioned the SHPO to remove the battlefield from the National Register. As the basis for the petition, the firm presented a new landowner list as evidence that a majority of the owners of small tracts of land on the battlefield objected to its designation. The SHPO readily accepted Jackson & Kelly’s list in place of the one that had already been submitted to the Keeper of the National Register to support
the site’s nomination. On December 30, 2009, the battlefield was delisted from the National Register.\(^5\)

The delisting of Blair Mountain sparked a local preservation effort that has continued to the present day. FOBM—along with the Sierra Club, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and several other groups—immediately challenged the Keeper’s ruling in a federal lawsuit. Additionally, in June 2011 a number of activist groups formed a coalition and organized a 50-mile, week-long protest march to save Blair Mountain and end mountaintop removal in Appalachia. On the final day of the march, some 800 protestors hiked up to the south crest of Blair Mountain, and the event received a good deal of national and local publicity. While the march had brought much-needed attention to the controversy, the battlefield’s status on the National Register remained uncertain.

MAKING A CASE FOR BLAIR MOUNTAIN
The obstacles to preserving Blair Mountain are considerable. Although the 2011 protest march was a big success and helped build momentum for the preservation effort, many of the activists were environmentalists—from grassroots groups to the Sierra Club—concerned more with the overall struggle to end mountaintop removal than with saving Blair Mountain’s labor history. It should come as no surprise that a strong anti-environmentalist sentiment exists in the coalfields. Since the 1990s coal companies
have spent a tremendous amount of time and money in a public campaign to debunk climate science and portray the environmental movement as hostile to blue-collar jobs. Thus, the prevalence of environmentalism has driven many coal miners and their families away from supporting efforts to preserve Blair Mountain. Anti-environmentalism has also contributed to many blue-collar workers in the area leaving the fold of the Democratic Party. Because of this atmosphere, FOBM has worked to shift the focus from surface mining to the history of the site. Convincing locals to support the cause has taken time, but the effort has paid off—as evidenced, for example, by the popularity of the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum.

State politicians have not been receptive to preservation efforts. In November 2011 FOBM submitted a petition to the state government documenting more than 50,000 supporters of preserving the battlefield. The governor’s office did not respond. In June 2012 a new petition supported by 100 labor historians touted the economic and educational benefits of a historic park at Blair Mountain. FOBM emailed the petition and park proposal to each member of the state House of Delegates and Senate, but did not receive a single response. In 2013 and 2014, FOBM lobbied the state legislature to pass a resolution in favor of a state park at Blair Mountain, but that resolution never made it to the floor.

Lobbying at the state capitol was a frustrating experience. The effect of approaching legislators about Blair Mountain was not unlike causing pigeons to scatter when taking a stroll through a city park. Many of them would not even make eye contact. The lowest point came when I visited Delegate Mike Caputo, a Democrat who has claimed to champion organized labor throughout his political career. I sat in Caputo’s office, a few feet away from Bill Raney, the head of the West Virginia Coal Association, who grinned at me over his coffee. While Caputo told me that he could not support our resolution to save the battlefield, I noticed a framed photograph of my great grandfather, veteran of the Mine Wars, on his office wall.
Those who wish to challenge the coal industry in West Virginia frequently endure personal and professional attacks. Many environmental activists, such as president of the Keeper of the Mountains Foundation Larry Gibson and Cherokee activist Maria Gunnoe, have faced death threats, physical beatings, and other types of harassment for their opposition to mountaintop removal. Members of FOBM have not been exempt from such treatment. Board members have been followed by cars in Charleston and in Logan County; have received death threats and threats of violence; and have found their phones tapped, their mail opened, and their computers hacked. The organization’s website has been hacked too many times to count.

HARD-FOUGHT PRESERVATION VICTORIES
Because the landowners will not allow anyone on the battlefield property, FOBM has monitored company activities using Google Earth and occasional flights over the battlefield. On a flyover in 2012, FOBM members noticed serious disturbances on the Camp Branch Surface Mine, one of three sites on the battlefield for which coal companies hold surface mining permits. Copies of these mining permits, which FOBM obtained via the Freedom of Information Act, clearly state that the companies were to respect a 1,000-foot buffer zone around the battlefield until the issue of the National Register listing had been settled. Surface disturbances in this area were evidence that this provision was not being enforced.

FOBM contacted the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP), the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Office of Surface Mining Regulation and Enforcement (OSMRE), demanding to know why regulations were not being enforced. On September 10, 2013, FOBM was finally able to secure approval for a citizen’s site inspection of Camp Branch in order to get a closer look at the damage that had been done to the battlefield. Before board members could make it to the site, however, one of them, Joe Stanley, was threatened by an out-of-uniform state trooper and another, King, fell and broke his ankle. FOBM was forced to call off that site inspection, and the request for a second one was denied.
Complicating matters even further, FOBM learned that Alpha Natural Resources wanted Camp Branch not exactly for the coal, but rather in order to construct a 7,000-foot runway for the Air National Guard. In 2013 Major General James A. Hoyer explained to FOBM board members that the National Guard wanted to use the site as a special ops training facility and drop zone. It would be the largest facility of its kind east of the Mississippi River, and constructing that runway would require blasting about 35 acres of the battlefield. Moreover, these plans originated in 2009, just when Blair Mountain had been briefly placed on the National Register. FOBM attempted to convince local newspapers to investigate the military base plan, believing that some key questions—whether that plan may have influenced the state or the Department of Interior to delist the battlefield and who stands to profit from the related defense contracts—merit exploration. Unfortunately, there has been very little media coverage of the issue. Regardless, the military facility plan helps explain why Alpha Natural Resources so aggressively pursued the permit at Camp Branch.

FOBM pressed on. In 2013 local attorney Mary Ann Maul agreed to represent the organization pro bono before the West Virginia Surface Mine Board. On December 9 FOBM won a unanimous decision that allowed board members to return to Camp Branch. That site inspection occurred on March 11, 2014, and Mari-Lynn Evans, one of the filmmakers for *Blood on the Mountain*, a 2016 account of the economic and environmental impact of the coal mining industry in West Virginia, documented the experience. The inspection revealed that forest areas within 1,000 feet of the battlefield had been clear cut (a prerequisite for surface mining) and that areas of the ridgeline had been bulldozed precisely along defensive entrenchments from the 1921 battle. Those entrenchments, and an unknown amount of archaeological evidence from the battle, have been permanently destroyed and eliminated from the historical record.

WVDEP responded to these findings by forcing Alpha Natural Resources to modify their Camp Branch permit, forbidding them to disturb any area of the battlefield and forcing them to put plans for
the runway on hold. FOBM board members have continued their activism, meeting numerous times with the governor’s office and executives of the coal and land companies to put forward a compromise settlement that would allow the military base to be built while preserving the rest of the battlefield and making the area a historic park. Thus far, this compromise proposal has not gained any traction.

Realizing that the state and federal governments may never actively support the preservation of this history, I joined with other activists and community members to create the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum. Located in historic Matewan, the museum is designed to educate the public about Blair Mountain and Mine Wars history. In May 2015, after two years of work and planning, the museum opened to a crowd of more than 500 locals and a dedication speech from UMWA President Cecil Roberts. Since then, the museum has hosted thousands of visitors from across the country and won a National Coal Heritage Award.

In spring 2016 preservationists scored a major victory when Federal Judge Reggie B. Walton ruled that the delisting of the Blair Mountain battlefield was both “arbitrary and capricious” and remanded the case back to the Keeper of the National Register. However, the Keeper has yet to reach a decision and Blair Mountain’s status on the National Register remains uncertain. The Keeper’s decision is vital because West Virginia state agencies will not enforce the National Historic Preservation Act to protect this significant site until it is listed on the National Register. The Keeper is expected to make a decision regarding the battlefield in summer 2017.

Understanding the conflict at Blair Mountain, both past and present, is key to understanding the great struggles of the workers who have fought to secure decent wages, safe working conditions, and a thriving middle class in the United States. It is also key to understanding our future—whether extractive industries will be permitted to destroy culture and environment in the name of profit and whether Appalachia will one day emerge from the shadow of the coal industry or continue clinging to an economic model that has dominated the region for more than a century. What happens
next, in the midst of a pro-corporate, anti-environmental Trump administration, is anyone’s guess. One thing is certain: during the Mine Wars, Frank Keeney never gave up. Neither will I, and neither will FOBM. FJ

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2 The current board of FOBM consists of West Virginia coalfield native and activist Jeff Bosley, award-winning photographer and activist Paul Corbit Brown, Logan County native and amateur archaeologist Kenny King, West Virginia native and Ball State University social studies professor Mark Myers, retired United Mine Workers of America miner and organizer Joe Stanley, and Charles B. Keeney III.
5 Ibid.

TAKEAWAY
Read “A Step Forward in Protecting Blair Mountain,” a Forum Blog post by Will Cook.

TAKEAWAY
A report issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in July 2016 concluded that the construction of a portion of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) across federally managed lands adjacent to Lake Oahe, just north of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, would not have adverse environmental impacts on that area. That determination gave Dakota Access LLC the go-ahead to construct the pipeline along that route. Yet this area, at the confluence of the Cannon Ball and the Missouri rivers, is a traditional cultural landscape that contains ancient village sites, burial cairns, stone features, stone effigies, and sacred sites with great religious and cultural significance for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe (SRST). The SRST spans both North Dakota and South Dakota and includes the Hunkpapa and Sihasapa bands of Lakota Oyate and the Ihunktuwona and Pabaksa bands of the Dakota Oyate.

Section 101 (d)(6)(b) of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires that federal agencies that either support historic properties or impact them in carrying out their Section 106 responsibilities must consult with any Indian tribes that attach religious or cultural significance to those sites. This requirement was blatantly ignored when the Army Corps of Engineers approved the proposed route of the DAPL. The SRST, with support from archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and others, has been forced to mount a legal challenge to preserve this revered environment, which has already been damaged and is further threatened by the construction process, the pipeline itself, and potential leakage.

ESSENTIAL CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE
Guiding outsiders to recognize—and respond appropriately and respectfully to—the cultural concerns of my people is my ongoing challenge as the SRST’s Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (SRST/
This regulatory office, authorized by the 1992 amendments to the NHPA, manages and protects SRST cultural resources, sacred areas, and sites within the original boundaries of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 and 1868 as well as the aboriginal homelands of the Oceti Sakonwin, also known as the Great Sioux Nation.

My mother is Isanti Dakota from the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate and my father is Hunkpapa Lakota from the SRST. I am fortunate to have known my grandparents and many elders in my lifetime, and it is my elders who, by sharing our oral history and sacred knowledge with me, endowed me with the capacity to serve my people. I have listened to our elders tell creation stories and impart star knowledge. It is because of their wisdom that I can tell when the first days of winter, spring, summer, and fall are just by looking at the stars. It is their teachings that have given me the ability to identify and evaluate stone features, burial cairns, and sacred sites without having to disturb the ground—and to determine when my ancestors were at these sites by examining their orientation and relationship to star constellations.

Given the depth of cultural knowledge, awareness, and sensitivity required to accurately make such determinations, nontribal archaeologists are largely unable to identify sites of religious and cultural significance. Only the tribes themselves have this ability, as the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation acknowledges when it “encourages agencies and the general public to fully understand the importance of consulting with Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations and respecting sacred sites.”

THE LAKE OAHE SITE
The Lake Oahe site was once a place of commerce where traditional enemies camped within sight of each other, possessed with such a reverence for the land that no blood was spilt there. Over the years several Sundances—which are among the most holy of the seven sacred rites given to the Lakota/Dakota Oyate by the creator—have taken place in this area because of the sacred nature of the rivers and the land.
The Cannon Ball River was known to my ancestors as *Inyan Wakan Kagapi Wakpa* (River Where the Sacred Stones Are Made), and the Missouri River was known as *Mni Sose* (Turbulent Water). The force of those two rivers coming together once formed a great whirlpool that created perfectly round stones considered sacred to the Mandan, Arikara, Cheyenne, and Oceti Sakonwin. But the rivers’ confluence was forever altered in 1958 when the Army Corps of Engineers created dams to generate hydroelectric power, neither consulting nor even informing the local community before beginning construction and flooding the river. The two rivers no longer produce the sacred stones. Our relatives and other communities that relied on the river bottom tell many sad stories about the deep spiritual wounds caused by its destruction. When they lost the river bottom, they lost traditional foods and medicine, which led to health problems that we had not previously encountered—diabetes, heart disease, and obesity—and caused us to become dependent on the Indian Health Service.
Our ancestors once prayed at the sacred stone that has long been at the Lake Oahe site. In an interview from the late 1800s, a warrior named Reclining Bear described the area:

*It was there when we came across the Missouri. I think it had been an Arikara stone. I think they found it first. They put things there, too. No one would strike an enemy around that place. Everyone was safe there. There were always many presents there. There were weapons and things to eat and valuable cloth on sticks. There were buffalo heads there, too, for meat to come around. It is very holy. It is there yet. I do not want to talk much about it.*

The location of the stone, which is confidential and protected by this office, remains a place of prayer today—we still travel there to leave offerings, asking for good direction, strength, and protection on behalf of our people.

The site has also become a nesting ground for eagles—hundreds of them have been sighted at a time. Everett Jamerson, a spiritual leader from Standing Rock, once told me, “The eagle is considered sacred to our people because, out of all the winged, they fly the highest. They fly so high they can see the curve of Grandmother Earth and know what’s coming.” Although eagles are no longer on the federal list of endangered species, they remain sacred to many Native American people: the Lakota commonly make offerings of tobacco when eagles are sighted, and receiving an eagle feather is one of the highest honors.

**MNI WICONI (WATER OF LIFE)**

Water, too, is sacred to my people. Our word for water is *Mni*, and we refer to it as *Mni Wiconi*, the water of life, because without water there can be no life. For nine months our mothers carried us in water. Long ago when a woman gave birth, the afterbirth was buried wherever her water had broken and touched the earth, forever connecting her child to that place. We are made up primarily of water, and we believe that it’s the water in us that reacts to spoken words. My elders taught me that—long ago, while the morning star was still in the sky—our ancestors would come out of
their lodges and pray with water, thus activating its life-giving properties. Water is considered the first medicine.

Our people still go to the Missouri River to make offerings and pray that all life sustained by our river—people, horses, buffalo, deer, fish, birds—may thrive. The waterways of this nation were the highways of previous times, as my ancestors traveled from lake to lake, river to river, stream to stream. Water defined our ancestral territory. Stone features, burial cairns, and stone effigies are found near water on hilltops and along ridges, hillsides, and drainages.

**INYAN (STONE)**

My elders taught me a deep reverence for the land. We do not look at *Unci Maka*, Grandmother Earth, as a resource, but rather as a living being who provides and nurtures. “Le makoce ki teunkilapi sni ki hehan un Lakotapi kte sni,” we say, which translates to, “When we no longer cherish the land, we will no longer be Lakota.”

My ancestors followed the buffalo, and the buffalo followed the stars. They traveled as far west as Wyoming and Montana, as far north as the Canadian bush country, as far east as the Great Lakes, and as far south as Kansas. This territory was the aboriginal homelands of the Oceti Sakonwin where my ancestors prayed with *Inyan*—stone. Wherever the buffalo roamed, my ancestors left evidence of their existence on the stone features of the land.

Protecting stone features is very important to the SRST. On July 2, 2014, the tribe passed resolution 378-14, which reads:

*NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the four (4) bands on the Standing Rock Reservation who are members of the original structure of Oceti Sakonwin claim all stone feature sites, our identified burial/places, stone alignments and effigies, our sacred landscapes and drainages that are connected to these sacred areas and sites, regardless of location, within our original homelands of Oceti Sakonwin: and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that wherever the buffalo roam and left its evidence of occupation, use and bone material is considered Oceti Sakonwin homelands as we are considered the Buffalo Nation or people and that is where you will find our*
sacred areas, burials, stone effigies and stone alignments of our star knowledge and sacred stone feature sites that only member band of the original Oceti Sakonwin can claim.

THE LEGAL BATTLE
On September 2, 2016, SRST lawyers filed an emergency injunction with the United States District Court for the District of Columbia based on evidence from a survey that former SRST/THPO Tim Mentz had conducted beginning on August 28. Mentz discovered more than 80 stone features and 27 ancient burials within the pipeline project area. The 2015 Cultural Resource Survey prepared by the Army Corps of Engineers for Dakota Access LLC made no mention of sites along the construction corridor, even though an archaeologist surveying the area would have literally had to walk right over them and not see what was on the ground in order to miss them. On September 3, the pipeline company knowingly destroyed sites of religious and cultural significance to SRST, thus violating the NHPA, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, North Dakota state law, and the terms of the permit issued by the Public Service Commission.

The SRST/THPO office sent a letter to the North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office asking for a Stop Work Order in order to evaluate the damage to our sites. I followed up with an in-person meeting, and the North Dakota Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) agreed to conduct an onsite investigation in conjunction with our office. We found out later that the SHPO and the state archaeologist conducted that investigation without consulting with the SRST.

Standing Rock Sioux cultural expert Tim Mentz.

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In September 2016 the Natural History Museum sent a letter to the Obama administration, Department of Justice, Department of the Interior, and the Army Corps condemning the destruction of our sacred sites. The letter, which was signed by more than 1,280 archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and museum personnel, stated:

As archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and museum workers committed to responsible stewardship, we are invested in the preservation and interpretation of archaeological and cultural heritage for the common good. We join the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in denouncing the recent destruction of ancient burial sites, places of prayer and other significant cultural artifacts sacred to the Lakota and Dakota people.

The letter concluded:

We call on the federal government to abide by its laws and to conduct a thorough environmental impact statement and cultural resources survey on the pipeline route, with proper consultation with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. We stand with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and affirm their treaty rights, tribal sovereignty, and the protection of their lands, waters, cultural and sacred sites, and we stand with all those attempting to prevent further irreparable losses.
Native languages, oral history, and sacred knowledge should be the database for American anthropology and archaeology. Our language, creation stories, star knowledge, oral histories, and sacred knowledge are the foundation that allows me as a THPO to properly identify and evaluate sacred sites without having to disturb the ground. The worldview and traditions of our people—passed down over generations and embodied by our sacred landscapes—are essential, irreplaceable American cultural resources, and must be recognized and protected accordingly.

JON EAGLE SR. has 17 years of experience consulting with tribal, state, and federal agencies and has served as the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe since February 2016.

**TAKEAWAY**

Read the National Trust’s guide to preserving Native American places.

**AUDIO**

Listen to a recording of an October 2016 Forum Webinar about the legal landscape of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s case against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.