



The National Park Service is entrusted with telling one of the most compelling stories in all American history: the saga of the Civil War and its still-unfolding aftermath in the ongoing struggle for civil rights. The 1965 Selma to Montgomery March for voting rights (left) is now commemorated at Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail (Alabama); there, on the fiftieth anniversary of the march in 2015 (right), tens of thousands retraced the footsteps of the original marchers.





Some of the nation's most revered and solemn places are Civil War battlefields preserved in the national park system. Antietam National Battlefield (Maryland).



For many years, the National Park Service shied away from talking about slavery at its Civil War sites, instead focusing on battle tactics. In a monumental shift, starting in the late 1990s the agency made the decision to interpret the primary cause of the war: slavery. Some of the first interpretive displays that addressed the impact of slavery were installed in Liberty Square, Fort Sumter National Monument (South Carolina).



# A DECLARATION

*OF THE IMMEDIATE CAUSES WHICH INDUCE  
AND JUSTIFY THE SECESSION OF THE  
STATE OF MISSISSIPPI FROM THE FED-  
ERAL UNION.*

In the momentous step which our State has taken of dissolving its connection with the government of which we so long formed a part, it is but just that we should declare the prominent reasons which have induced our course.

Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery—the greatest material interest of the world. Its labor supplies the product which constitutes by far the largest and most important portions of the commerce of the earth. These products are peculiar to the climate verging on the tropical regions, and by an imperious law of nature, none but the black race can bear exposure to the tropical sun. These products have become necessities of the world, and a blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization. That blow has been long aimed at the institution, and was at the point of reaching its consummation. There was no choice left us but submission to the mandates of abolition, or a dissolution of the Union, whose principles had been subverted to work out our ruin.

The wording of Mississippi's Declaration of Secession, displayed at Shiloh National Military Park (Tennessee, Mississippi), leaves no doubt that the perpetuation of American slavery was the real cause of the Civil War.

Still, most citizens of Corinth and Tishomingo County supported the status quo and elected pro-Union delegates to a meeting in Jackson





Until the proclamation of Reconstruction Era National Monument (South Carolina) in 2017 (after the course textbook was published), the fraught history of Reconstruction — arguably one of the least-understood periods in American history — was only partially addressed at several national parks. “Education of the Freedmen” exhibit, Shiloh National Military Park (Tennessee, Mississippi); Andrew Johnson National Historic Site (Tennessee).





Key figures in African American history are front and center in a number of parks. (Above left and below) Entrance to Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site (Washington, D.C.); Mary McLeod Bethune and Eleanor Roosevelt (second and third from left), 1943. (Right) Frederick Douglass National Historic Site (Washington, DC).



Nicodemus National Historic Site (Kansas) preserves several historic buildings (here, a schoolhouse) in one of a few remaining Western towns founded by and for African Americans after the Civil War.





When visitors arrive at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (West Virginia), they usually know about John Brown's efforts to free slaves. Few know that nearby buildings housed Storer College, a school created to educate freed slaves following emancipation; (left) Storer College students and teachers ca. 1910; (right) the view from atop Jefferson Rock is a panorama of the park at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers.





A portion of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas — still in use today — is set aside as Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site (Arkansas) to mark the site of federally enforced desegregation of the school. (Above) Contemporary view of the high school; (inset) Federal soldiers escorting students from class in the first days of desegregation, 1957.