

The Changing Face of the Country: Environmental History and the Legacy of the Civil War at Stones River National Battlefield

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IN 1927, CONGRESS AUTHORIZED THE WAR DEPARTMENT to acquire a portion of the site near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, where the Battle of Stones River took place. This marked the culmination of nearly three decades of agitation for a park by war veterans, North and South. The authorizing legislation directed the War Department to “carefully study the available records and historical data with respect to the location and movement of all troops which engaged in the battle of Stones River [December 31, 1862–January 2, 1863] and the important events connected therewith, with a view of preserving and marking such field for historical and professional military study.” A commission appointed to survey the battlefield area for a feasible site selected approximately 325 acres situated adjacent to the 20-acre Stones River National Cemetery, a logical choice because the enabling legislation provided for inclusion of the cemetery, established in 1865 as the final resting place for more than 6,000 Union soldiers, including US Colored Troops. In 1930, this law was amended to enable the War Department to construct roads and walkways and to landscape the grounds.¹

Except for the national cemetery and three existing monuments, all of the land selected for park development was privately owned. Land condemnation and acquisition proceedings took place over a five-year period from 1929 through 1934. Park development, however, began in 1931. The first item of business was to remove all traces of human occupation that post-dated the war, in this case the central area of a sprawling, semi-rural African American community known variously as The Cedars or Cemetery. The first name designates a hamlet located in and around a grove of cedar trees; the second designates the larger African American settlement of which it was a part. Both names indicate the hamlet’s proximity to the national cemetery.² A 1929 War Department inventory of property details the quality of the land and improvements thereon: 17 houses, three cabins, eight barns, one smokehouse, one chicken shed, 11 miscellaneous sheds, four wells, 730 fruit trees (identified as peach in some instances), 1,000 blackberry vines, 200 grape vines, two churches, and one store.³ The two church buildings, the only structures known to have been relocated, were moved

The George Wright Forum, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 161–181 (2011).

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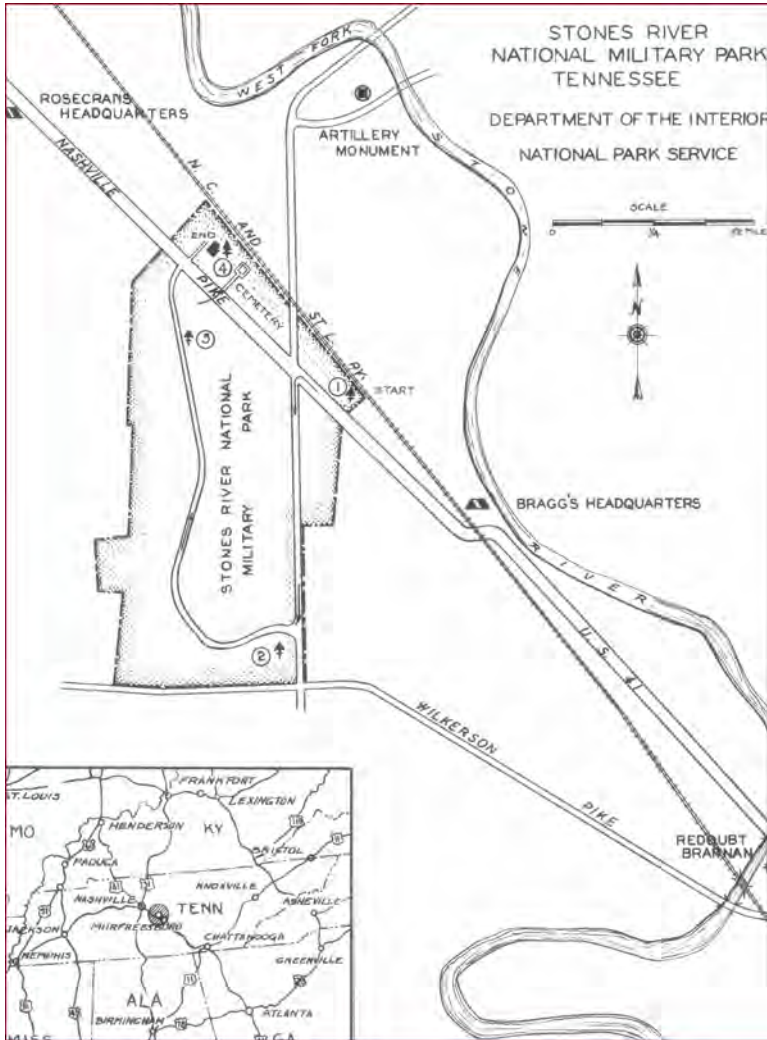


Figure 1. Map of Stones River National Military Park, ca. 1934, National Park Service. Courtesy Stones River National Battlefield. The auto tour road entrance, marked by a bent arrow, was then located at the intersection of Nashville Pike and Van Cleve Lane (unmarked). Tour stops, indicated by numbers, were (1) Hazen's Brigade Monument (1863), (2) the Slaughter Pen site, (3) probably the Defense of Nashville Pike site, (4) the US Regulars Monument (1888) at Stones River National Cemetery. Van Cleve Lane running north ends at the Artillery Monument (1906).

approximately one-half mile north, near a third church, a one-room school house, and the African American burial ground known as Evergreen Graveyard, situated near another grove of cedar trees. At least one more store, a combination general store and gas station, plus other farmsteads, dwellings, and outbuildings lay outside the area slated for parkland.⁴ The actual number of people displaced is harder to calculate because several parcels were by then owned in estate by multiple heirs. Nonetheless, the inventory attests to the presence of a rural hamlet sustained in large part by agriculture, although most of the land on which the hamlet

sat contained limestone outcroppings of various densities, and fully one-third of the 325 acres was untillable.⁵

Although African Americans owned the greater number of parcels, which ranged in size from 1–17 acres, approximately half the total acreage was held by a handful of white landowners, some of them from locally prominent families.⁶ Judging by a 1931 newspaper article, white residents of Murfreesboro approved of the park because it replaced what was considered a blighted area. An unnamed reporter was of the opinion that the “most marked improvement,” involved removal of “the score or more negro cabins and an old church which clustered along the winding Van Cleave [sic] lane.”⁷ George Chandler, however, the army officer responsible for compiling the 1929 property inventory, was troubled by the land acquisition process:

As I check and recheck the recapitulation I cannot help but wonder what sort of an idea it all conveys to anyone who has not been on the ground and lived in the community. . . . The negro holdings are a strange problem. The houses are in general worthless, and yet, they are the family’s home and we are displacing the family which must find a new home some place.⁸

Indeed, it had been home to some families for two or three generations, and not all of them relocated willingly. Percy Minter, born in one of those houses in 1914, grew up on an 11-acre tract that had enough arable land for the family to grow cotton. After his father died in 1922, Percy and some of his six siblings worked the land along with their mother until the federal government took their property. The Minters held out until 1932, when they finally sold the property under court order.⁹ Minter recalls that a trusted friend of the family told his mother:

‘Rowena, don’t go nowhere.’ He say, ‘we goin’ to get you more money.’ We had eleven acres. This white fellow . . . he had two acres there. They gave him more for them two acres than they wanted to give my mother for them eleven acres. We stayed there [until] 1932.¹⁰

Between October 1931, when land clearance began, and July 1932, when the park was dedicated, the site of Cemetery Community was transformed. Where there had been houses, outbuildings, fruit orchards, and two churches clustered along Van Cleave Lane, together with gardens, stone and wood rail fences, and cultivated fields, the War Department attempted to recreate a battlefield landscape, albeit with a modern road to make that landscape accessible to automobile tourists. Stone masonry columns topped with pyramids of ten-inch cannon balls flanked a park entrance where Van Cleave Lane intersected Nashville Highway (now paved and also known as the Dixie Highway), and 2,500 new trees, shrubs, and other plants lined the park road. Cast-metal historical markers interpreted battle actions, and wire fencing marked the park perimeter.¹¹

At the time, the practice of removing all traces of material culture not associated with the slice of history being preserved was the reigning principle of historic preservation in general and national park development more specifically: to preserve a *moment* rather than a *continuum* of time. After military parks were transferred from the War Department to the

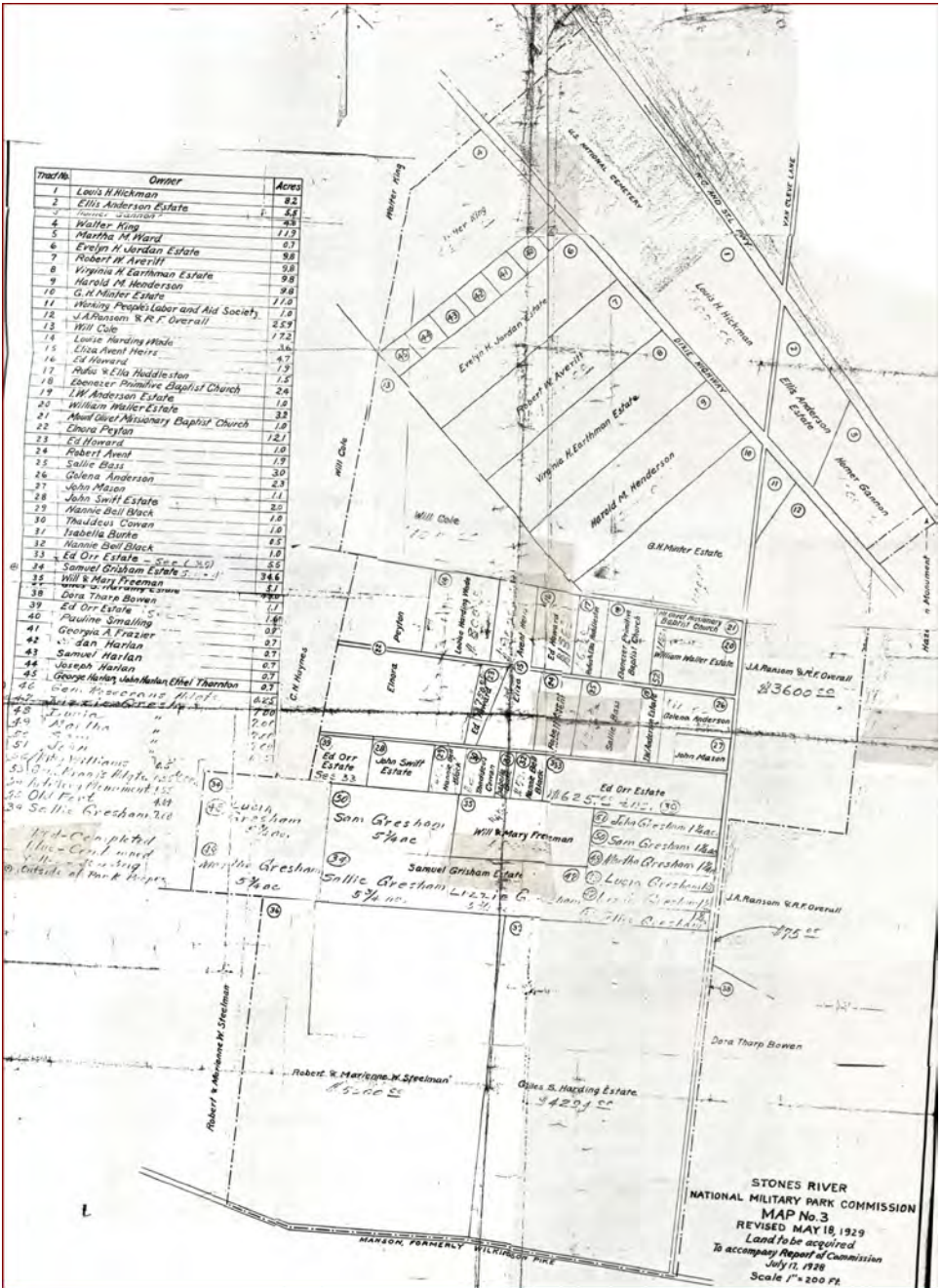


Figure 2. Land acquisition map for Stones River National Military Park, US War Department, 1929. The smaller parcels in the center contained most of the buildings in The Cedars. Courtesy Stones River National Battlefield.



Figure 3. Stones River National Military Park Commission photograph, 1928. Courtesy Stones River National Battlefield. The caption with this photograph indicates that the building visible in the left background is a church. With this identification as a firm clue, the vantage point of the photographer would have been facing southwest from the intersection of Nashville Highway and Van Cleve Lane. Thus, it is likely that the house and outbuildings on the right were situated on the Minter property, a triangular parcel bounded by both roads.



Figure 4. South entrance to Stones River National Military Park at Van Cleve Lane from the Nashville Highway. The view in the distance is where The Cedars was located.

Department of Interior in 1933 by executive order of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the National Park Service continued to improve Stones River. With assistance through two New Deal relief agencies, the Civil Works Administration and the Public Works Administration, the NPS supervised work crews that cleared rock piles, broke up the remaining fence rows, and disposed of “rubbish” associated with land use by the residents of Cemetery Community.¹² NPS landscape architects introduced landscaping techniques such as screen plantings and trimmed grassy areas so the park “could readily be used as a recreational area to

serve the people of Murfreesboro.” Because the size of the park, less than one-tenth of the battlefield area, made it impossible to interpret the full extent of military actions where they had occurred, NPS Chief Historian Verne Chatelain recommended developing a recreational area with tables, benches, fireplaces or grills, segregated comfort stations, running water, and a museum “to serve as a focus for the educational work at the park.”¹³ However, funding was never available to implement these recreational and interpretive elements. Wayside markers provided some geographic context, and the park offered ranger-led tours for those who wanted more information. Until 1956, Chickamauga–Chattanooga National Military Park administered Stones River, and the only on-site manager was the superintendent of the national cemetery. With the exception of periodic road improvements and construction of utility buildings, the park remained minimally developed until the 1960s.¹⁴

The National Park Service has considered “landscape” fundamental to interpretation at battlefield parks ever since they were transferred from the War Department in 1933. Verne Chatelain, the first chief historian, articulated a concept of site-based interpretation that was to become ubiquitous in historical parks. As Chatelain recalled in a 1961 interview with Charles Hosmer, he “found very little evidence of any kind of program which served as an example or a precedent for what we wanted to do” when he joined the NPS in 1931. He went on to explain that, “for many years the War Department had been entrusted with the national battlefield sites . . . but the opportunity to get a reasonably credible, accurate story with all the devices that would make for a clear understanding of what happened there was simply lacking.”¹⁵ The way to a clear understanding at a battlefield site, in the thinking of the 1930s, was to mark the landscape with interpretive signage, including maps, so that visitors could envision the dramatic event as it unfolded.

In this sense, Chatelain saw landscape as a stage, whereas one of his contemporaries, geographer Carl O. Sauer, had just introduced the concept of “cultural landscapes” as a complex geography “derived in each case from the natural landscape, [with] man expressing his place in nature as a distinct agent of modification.”¹⁶ Sauer’s historical-anthropological approach to geography had no apparent influence on Chatelain, and actually, little influence outside the confines of cultural geography in the United States until J.B. Jackson founded *Landscape Magazine* in 1951. Through its pages, Sauer’s thinking began to reach a wider audience.¹⁷ Over the past three decades, however, cultural geography has transformed into an interdisciplinary field of landscape studies, which has greatly influenced the evaluation and management of cultural resources in the National Park Service.¹⁸ Yet this influence has not extended very far when it comes to telling the stories inherent in our national parks. Civil War battlefields, which typically have extensive land areas, may be ideally suited for using cultural landscape approaches to interpret the significance of the Civil War more fully: in addition to the terrain of battle, the landscape is just as useful for interpreting the slave-based plantation economy overturned by the Civil War and the land-based communities of freed people who struggled for purchase in a new agricultural regime.

Fast forward to the decade-long NPS capital improvement program known as Mission 66, which ran from 1956 to 1966. Stones River National Battlefield was among the many parks developed or redeveloped during this period. To lay the groundwork for park development and new interpretive programs, Chief Historian Edwin Bearss conducted extensive

cotton field near Nashville Highway where one existed at the time of the battle and where the Minters were still growing cotton when they gave up their 11-acre home place in 1932. The museum in the visitor center presented a more family-oriented interpretation of the war emphasizing the common experiences of (white) soldiers who fought on both sides rather than the complex military actions of battle. This interpretive approach, which became standard at Civil War battlefield parks, conveniently ignored the obvious link between past and present and continued a long-established pattern of reconciliation through commemoration that began in the late 19th century.²⁰ Ironically, dedication of the new visitor center in April 1964 took place in the midst of a raging congressional debate over pending civil rights legislation and in the midst of the Civil War centennial. Interpreting the human side of soldiers in blue and gray thus gave the appearance of modernity without entangling the National Park Service in the new civil war being fought at public schools, at lunch counters in public places, on public transportation, at polling places, and in the press.²¹ In this respect, it continued the official policy of non-discrimination at national parks without acknowledging that African Americans were central to the Civil War story or considering the implications of black-middle-class participation in the post-World War II automobile tourism boom.²²

As the Mission 66 build-out took place, American society was in the midst of transformative change. The National Park Service reacted in various ways. In the late 1960s, NPS Director George Hartzog and Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall embarked on reshaping the system to include recreational areas, scenic rivers, and national trails. This was a continued response to increasing numbers of park visitors as well as new national-level concerns for the environment. Passage of the General Authorities Act in 1970 officially redefined the system to include parkways and recreational areas.²³ Dwight Rettie argues that the 1970 act also represented the first time that “Congress clearly recognized that the national park system is something more than the sum of its parts,” that, in the whole, “it is a statement about our national patrimony.”²⁴ As prodigiously documented by Michael Kammen, the national pride fostered by World War II intensified in the post-war years, then twisted in myriad ways to become an institutionalized and commercialized “heritage syndrome,” which continues unabated and increasingly blurs the line between “history” and “heritage.”²⁵ The National Park Service has not been entirely immune to this phenomenon, although NPS resource management protocols and an increasing emphasis on the educative function of national parks have been mitigating forces.²⁶

As Rettie observes, 1970 marks the point where national patrimony superseded patriotism as an underlying rationale for developing the national park system. The concept of a representative national park system took hold under Udall’s successor, Walter J. Hickel. During his short tenure as secretary of the interior (1969–1970), Hickel issued a memorandum directing the Park Service to “protect and exhibit the best examples” of America’s landscapes and undersea environments as well as the “life communities that grow and dwell therein[,] and the important landmarks of our history.” Hickel further directed the Park Service to remedy “serious gaps and inadequacies” in the system in order that Americans could “understand their heritage of history and the natural world.”²⁷ In response, NPS developed the National Park System Plan (1972), which expanded the thematic framework developed under the 1935 Historic Sites Act and established an elaborate taxonomic matrix to

treat all major aspects of American history—as then perceived—and to represent the full range of natural resources.”²⁸

Since 1972, the national park system has grown to include an impressive, if not fully representative, array of historic places. Today, the system encompasses more than 390 park units, and nearly half of them are classified variously as historical parks, historic sites, national battlefields, and national memorials. In terms of acreage, historical units account for a mere fraction—less than 300,000 acres—of the more than 84,000,000 acres protected by the National Park Service.²⁹ But their value cannot be calculated in terms of acreage. As the nation’s education policies have narrowed to privilege science and math and hardened around standards-based pedagogy, national parks increasingly have been seen as important places for interpreting the diversity and complexity of American history and culture. To facilitate the telling of more inclusive stories, the NPS framework for history was completely reconceptualized in the early 1990s, when the traditional periods and themes anchored in Euroamerican experience were replaced with “eight concepts that encompass the multi-faceted and interrelated nature of human experience.”³⁰

Although many of the new historical units established since 1972 represent a continuation of established patterns—presidential birthplaces and homes, forts, and sites associated with or commemorating wars—the majority speak to a broadened view of American history, thanks in large part to the modern “rights” movements, which moved the system closer to representing America’s pluralistic character. Many relatively young parks reflect rising demand for recognition and respect among groups long marginalized in American society and American history.³¹ Amplifying the concept of national parks as conservators of national patrimony, the National Park System Advisory Board, in its 2001 report *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century*, called upon the agency to think of parks as places to tell America’s history “faithfully, completely, and accurately” because “our nation’s history is our civic glue.”³² In the past decade, the National Park Service has embraced civic engagement as one way to distance national parks from the heritage movement.³³

To these policy shifts one must add the current initiative to reinterpret Civil War sites, which began in 1998 when several NPS professionals met in Nashville to discuss a range of issues at Civil War parks, including the need for interpretation based on modern historiography. Then in 2000, at the urging of US Representative Jesse Jackson, Jr., Congress directed the secretary of the interior to encourage NPS managers at Civil War sites to “recognize ... the unique role that the institution of slavery played in causing the Civil War.” This led to another forum of park superintendents and scholars, out of which came *Rally on the High Ground*, a guidebook of sorts for beginning the process of acknowledging slavery as the underlying cause of the Civil War and the consequences of the war for the nation as a whole.³⁴

All of these policy directions have converged at Civil War historic sites to create a complex resource management situation. Stones River National Battlefield is thus not unique in this respect, but it is one place where park management pursues an integrated approach to natural and cultural resource management. More to the point, integrated resource management has created an opening to employ analytic approaches associated with environmental history, notably the interdisciplinary scholarship of cultural landscape studies, to address

both aspects of the park's resource management responsibilities. Since the 1930s, the park has expanded to more than 600 acres and now includes approximately 3,000 linear feet of earthen works associated with Fortress Rosecrans, a 200-acre enclosure where the Union Army decamped in 1863 to hold the Chattanooga and Nashville Railroad line, a major objective of the Battle of Stones River. The earthen works, subject to erosion and structural disruption from burrowing animals, trees, and woody plants, pose one set of challenging preservation problems. The park routinely partners with community organizations and professors at nearby Middle Tennessee State University to maintain a historically representative ecology throughout the park.

Additionally, the park now protects within its boundaries a 185-acre cedar glade (a type of barrens) that has been designated a state natural area. The protected glade includes the battle area known as the Slaughter Pen. So, too, it represents the untillable land described in the 1929 inventory of property acquired for the initial park. This is no historical coincidence. Available evidence suggests that Cemetery Community emerged in this area of the former battlefield for three primary reasons: the presence of a contraband camp near Fortress Rosecrans; the corresponding formation of US Colored Troops (USCT) from among the contraband who gathered at Fortress Rosecrans, many of whom mustered out of service at Nashville; and the presence of Stones River National Cemetery, established in 1865. Circumstantial evidence points to poor-quality land as a fourth reason.

The Civil War diary of Jabez Cox, a soldier with the 133rd Regiment of Indiana Volunteers, which was detailed to Fortress Rosecrans from June through August 1864, contains an entry suggesting that the large contraband camp near Fortress Rosecrans might have been located in the vicinity of what is now the national park.³⁵ Another entry notes that the US Army was hiring African American refugees "by the month" to tend "several hundred acres of government cotton in this vicinity," meaning land either abandoned by Confederate loyalists or confiscated by the occupying Union troops.³⁶ When the 133rd Regiment left Fortress Rosecrans to return to Indiana, Cox recorded a final entry describing the "face of the country" around Murfreesboro:

The face of the country had changed a great deal since we went to Murfreesboro the corn and cotton was then small the corn is now ripe and the pods of cotton bursting. The country generally looks desolate [An] old cotton press and an occasional dwelling with a few cultivated fields was all the signs of civilization seen³⁷

The next year, in 1865, the federal government established Stones River National Cemetery near the intersection of Van Cleve Lane and Nashville Highway. William Holland, a former slave and veteran of the 111th Regiment, US Colored Infantry, worked for many years at the national cemetery and eventually purchased land nearby.³⁸ Holland's story was repeated as other USCT veterans took up farming or found work as laborers in the national cemetery and became part of the African American settlement taking shape in the surrounding countryside. The War Department hired African Americans to retrieve and re-bury bodies, build the graveled cemetery lanes and limestone perimeter wall, landscape the grounds,

and maintain the whole. The federal government also established a field office of the Freedmen's Bureau in Murfreesboro, which provided an additional measure of security for a time. The commander of federal forces supporting the Murfreesboro field office assumed that the military would be entirely responsible for protecting "this unfortunate class of people" since "truly they cannot be left to the tender mercies of their former masters, the majority of whom may be disposed to treat them with kindness, but many are vindictive and treat them with cruelty."³⁹ At war's end, federal officials grappled with the issue of where thousands of freed people in the city and surrounding area were to settle permanently. In the summer of 1865, officials were trying to locate "some good plantation to put Freedmen on" since most of the abandoned land had already been leased out.⁴⁰ In a society keen to regain its agrarian economy, tillable land was a valuable commodity, and white farmers had priority access to good cropland.⁴¹

As of 1870, approximately 16,500 African Americans were living in Rutherford County, nearly 50% of the population.⁴² Although the scars of battle were still evident on the land, a contemporary account indicates that the approximately 4,000 acres on which the Battle of Stones River was fought were once again producing corn and cotton. "Timber is scarce in this region, but wherever any could be found, it bore the marks of battle," wrote a correspondent for the *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* in 1869. "At present," he continued, "the largest portion of the battlefield of Stone [sic] River is in cultivation, and where the sanguinary conflict once raged are now to be found fields of corn and cotton." Interestingly, during his inspection of the former battlefield, the newspaper correspondent spoke only with African Americans, one of whom told him that the Ku Klux Klan had recently "acted awful bad right about here and drove more than a hundred colored people away from their crops."⁴³ This statement suggests that many African Americans were tending their own fields. Legal documents present a clearer picture. In 1870, slightly more than 1,500 African Americans were enumerated in Civil District 9 of Rutherford County, the boundaries of which included much of Cemetery Community. Adult males and older children typically worked as farm laborers, although as many as six men identified as "farmers" owned real property. By 1880, approximately 30 African Americans, including three women, owned land in District 9. Many of them owned only a few acres, but several had landholdings of between 25 and 100 acres, indicating an established agricultural settlement comprising primarily blacks, although many of them still tended land owned by whites.⁴⁴

As the 1870 and 1880 censuses make clear, the majority of African Americans associated with Cemetery Community tilled the soil, either as farm owners, sharecroppers, or farm laborers. Land in or near the cedar brake and cedar woods, gradually parceled out and sold to African Americans, became the hamlet known as The Cedars.⁴⁵ Although the legal and informal means by which this transfer of land ownership took place is the subject of ongoing study, the size of the landholdings and their location, on marginally productive land, fit a pattern of rural segregation in the South.⁴⁶

Cemetery Community was only one of several post-emancipation African American settlements to emerge in and around Murfreesboro, and one of thousands throughout the South. In the aggregate, all of them are important for understanding how the face of the country changed, particularly in the South, as freed people sought to exercise their rights



Figure 6. Detail of 1938 aerial photograph showing Stones River National Battlefield as the landscape appeared at that time. The severity of its karst topography is revealed and the remnants of property boundaries in The Cedars are clearly visible.

and privileges as new citizens in an environment of hostility and resentment. That broad story is especially poignant at Stones River National Battlefield. Here African Americans were able to concentrate land ownership and, in concert, establish the social institutions that not only nurtured community life but sustained it even after the heart of the community was removed. A series of photographs taken by Albert Kern between 1896 and 1904, during which time he traveled several times to the battlefield site, provide the best evidence of what the area looked like at the turn of the 20th century. Although few of Kern's photographs can be matched precisely with present-day locations, they nonetheless give us a feel for the land and people of Cemetery Community.

The cedar glade protected in Stones River National Battlefield has not changed much in 150 years, but our values have. Cedar glades, a distinctive natural feature of the Central Basin, are disappearing from Tennessee at an alarming rate because of urban development, which is particularly intense in the metropolitan Nashville area. Seventeen of the 29 plant species endemic to Tennessee are present in the park, which, since 2001, has been an important site for the recovery of two federally endangered species, Pyne's ground plum (*Astragalus bibullatus*) and Tennessee purple coneflower (*Echinacea tennesseensis*). In 2006, the park received a Governor's Environmental Stewardship Award for Excellence in Natural Heritage Conservation to recognize its native habitat restoration program. This award came shortly after the city of Murfreesboro completed construction of a four-lane parkway from Interstate Highway 24 to create a new, luxuriously landscaped "gateway." On one side of the parkway rises a sprawling medical complex; on the other, an upscale shopping mall and conference center. New construction has consumed several hundred acres of land adjacent to the park. In addition to closing off any opportunity for significant land acquisition to approximate the 4,000-acre battlefield area, a long-cherished dream of many park supporters, it is

Figure 7. Albert Kern photograph, Stones River Battlefield Collection, late 1890s. The image contains no identifying information about the names of the two men or the precise location on the former battlefield, but the terrain and vegetation are consistent with The Cedars. Kern, an attorney in Dayton, Ohio, photographed battlefield sites as part of the coordinated effort to establish Civil War military parks. Courtesy Montgomery County Historical Society, Dayton, Ohio.



clear that Stones River National Battlefield now sits as an island in the midst of urban development, which has disrupted habitats, generated more traffic and noise, and marred viewsheds.

The park has always faced the challenge of interpreting a big story in a limited space. Now this challenge is greater than ever: the story to be told is much more complex, and the space available has nearly reached its limit, both as congressionally authorized and practically feasible. To help address this challenge, the park collaborates with many local organizations and various departments at Middle Tennessee State University, including the Public History Program, which has developed an umbrella project called “Stones River Battlefield Historic Landscape” to document and interpret the post-Civil War history of the battlefield area. This project is part of an ongoing effort by the park to expand the story of the three-day battle the park was established to commemorate. In the past several years, the park has installed a new permanent exhibit that addresses slavery and sectionalism. It also has added wayside exhibits and interpretive programs that address the roles of African Americans in building Fortress Rosecrans and their service in the USCT.

Rather than present multiple, competing views about the causes and legacy of the Civil War, the Stones River Battlefield Historic Landscape project aims to foreground “the face of the country” in order to situate tangled stories of a specific place in ways that help make an immensely complicated and important national story both intelligible and compelling on a human, local scale.⁴⁷ This means giving park users a kind of intellectual freedom as they roam a landscape permeated with a deep swath of human and natural history. It means interpreting the landscape forthrightly in ways that treat the ground beneath visitors’ feet not only as a place hallowed by sacrifice but also as a place where Americans, black and white, began the long and difficult process of creating a new kind of nation. It asks visitors to imagine what “freedom” meant, literally, on this very ground. And the definition of “freedom” was most uncertain for the freed people who had to reknit families, make a new community, and figure out how to thrive in an unfriendly country.

Since 2007, graduate students have been gathering research data and developing interpretive products focused on the story of Cemetery Community. Dozens of graduate students have combed deeds; court records; manuscript census pages; poll and property tax records; genealogical data; records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands; USCT registers; and other holdings in the park archives, local repositories, and the National Archives. Their findings have outlined the progression of black land ownership in the park’s core area, where the spatial pattern of African American holdings coincides topographically with the poor soils of the cedar glade, and in the surrounding area outside the park, where arable land is more abundant. Historic photographs from the mid-1890s to the late 1920s provide visual clues concerning the natural features, agricultural fields, fences, roads, and structures as well as the people who lived here.⁴⁸ Oral history is helping to connect family stories with the land.⁴⁹ Recently, a team of graduate students distilled masses of data and held community focus sessions to create design concepts for a new wayside exhibit, which will be placed along Van Cleve Lane, commemorating the history of Cemetery Community.⁵⁰

While the story of Cemetery Community is important to document and tell, the research palette for cultural landscape interpretation in the park is actually broader. Graduate stu-

dents have also worked closely with park staff to develop a four-part thematic framework for interpreting the changing landscape of the battlefield area from the Civil War to the present.⁵¹ The first theme, “Wasteland,” examines the battle-scarred and denuded landscape that was consecrated with the establishment of a national cemetery in 1865. The second focuses on Cemetery Community, which imposed a new community structure and new agricultural regime on battlefield land. “Commemoration” traces the long history of remembering the battle, beginning with the erection of Hazen’s Brigade Monument in 1863 and the establishment of Stones River National Cemetery in 1865 through the park’s Mission 66 redevelopment. The fourth, “Landscape Connections,” introduces the more recent environmental imperatives that added ecological protection and restoration to the park’s resource management responsibilities.

Within this framework, there are many interconnected stories that are linked in one way or another with the park’s purpose, to preserve a battlefield, and its core story. Not only can these stories enrich the context for new generations to understand the meaning and legacy of the Civil War, they also link this special place to broader historical questions of scholarly concern. How, for instance, does the process of African American community-building in this location compare to various patterns throughout the South during Reconstruction? By what localized processes did owner-operator farming, sharecropping, and tenant farming replace the slave-labor system of agriculture, and what differences were manifest in localized agricultural practices? How is the racialized landscape of memory revealed in national parks?

Ecological restoration and resource sustainability are major contemporary concerns of the National Park Service, and a number of scholarly and professional organizations strongly support science- and scholarship-based management of all resources in parks and protected areas. Environmental history is just one node of scholarship among many disciplines that inform resource management. However, the lens of environmental history has a wide angle that enables us to capture the complexities of human interaction with the natural environment over time. How have people, through time, adapted to or altered the natural landscape, and with what consequences? How does the land itself help us understand human history? Asking these kinds of questions can expand and deepen public understanding of a park’s significance as well as provide a historic perspective on contemporary resource management concerns.

For more than a century, Civil War battlefield parks effectively enabled Americans to ignore one of the most important chapters in American history. National parks of course have not been the only, or even primary, drivers of institutionalized ignorance in this respect, but we know that national parks are important public places for imparting knowledge. Considering that approximately 200,000 people visit Stones River National Battlefield each year, the story of The Cedars and the larger Cemetery Community of which it was part, have considerable potential for helping visitors to understand the legacy of the Civil War in a particular locale. How did the Civil War change the face of the country, here and elsewhere? The key to telling this story fairly, and repeatedly, lies in doing what the National Park Service does best: place-based interpretation.

Endnotes

1. An Act to Establish a National Military Park at the Battle Field of Stones River, Tennessee, March 3, 1927 (44 Stat. 1399); An Act to Amend Section 5 of the Act Entitled “An Act to Establish a National Military Park at the Battle Field of Stones River, Tennessee, approved March 3, 1927,” approved April 15, 1930 (46 Stat. 167); Ann Wilson Willett, “A History of Stones River National Military Park” (MA thesis, Middle Tennessee State College, 1958), 62–71. See also Sean M. Styles, *Stones River National Battlefield Historic Resource Study* (Southeast Regional Office: National Park Service, 2004) and Miranda Fraley, “The Politics of Memory: Remembering the Civil War in Rutherford County, Tennessee” (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 2004).
2. An earlier name of “Ebenezer” is recorded in conjunction with the short-lived Tennessee Manual Labor University, organized by African Americans and chartered by the state of Tennessee in 1866. The school was built near Stones River National Cemetery. Whether it had any association with Ebenezer Primitive Baptist Church, one of the two churches situated in The Cedars, is unknown; see Lydia Morehouse, “Settling In: Tracking the Formation of Cemetery Community through Legal Documents” (MA thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2011).
3. George Chandler, Officer in Charge, to Quartermaster General, memorandum re: “Purchase of Land QM 601.1 C-R,” October 22, 1929, File 601, Miscellaneous, Stones River National Military Park, RG 79, Records of the War Department Relating to National Parks, National Archives, College Park, MD.
4. Visual information comes from the Albert Kern Collection of Civil War Negatives (1896–1904), Montgomery County Historical Society, Dayton, Ohio [copies at Stones River National Battlefield Archives] and the Stones River Commission Photographs (1928), Stones River National Battlefield Archives.
5. Chandler memorandum.
6. The presence of some buildings on parcels held by white landowners indicates that some black residents were sharecroppers or tenants. See Angela Smith, Richard White, and Kristen Baldwin Deathridge, “Land Ownership along Van Cleve Lane” (research report for HIST 6510/7510, Middle Tennessee State University, December 7, 2007).
7. “Stones River Park Becoming Beauty Spot of Mid-State,” *Daily News Journal* [Murfreesboro, TN], October 1, 1931. Oral tradition holds that both church buildings were moved by wagon to their new locations, and a 1980 architectural survey confirms that two 19th-century church buildings were then extant on two adjacent parcels of land acquired for relocation. It is possible that the newspaper reporter was not aware of the second church because it would not have been visible from Nashville Highway.
8. Chandler memorandum.
9. Rowena Minter et al. to USA, Decree Deed, Rutherford County Register of Deeds, Book 78, 259–260, executed February 24, 1932 and recorded July 8, 1933.
10. Percy Minter, Sr., interview with Elena DiGrado and others, November 1, 2007, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University. The 1929 War Department inventory and map shows that the white man in question owned six acres, not two, and the entire parcel was considered “tillable.” Of the 11 acres owned by the Minters, seven

acres were classified as “tillable” and the other four acres “rough.” Even so, the Minter property was valued lower than the six-acre parcel. The method by which the War Department acquired land left a legacy of bitterness that persists to this day.

11. Willett, 85–90.
12. “Stones River Lands, Buildings, Roads & Trails: Civil Works Administration,” File No. 0-31-619, Part 1, Stones River National Military Park, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, December 22, 1933–January 30, 1934, Stones River National Battlefield Park Records.
13. “National Military Park, Stones River: Public Works,” File No. 0-31-618, Part 1, Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Stones River National Park, February 2, 1934–December 24, 1935, Stones River National Battlefield Park Records.
14. Willett, 106–110.
15. Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., “Verne E. Chatelain and the Development of the Branch of History of the National Park Service,” *The Public Historian* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 32–34.
16. Carl Ortwin Sauer, “The Morphology of Landscape,” in *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 333.
17. On Sauer’s influence through Jackson and, in the UK, W.G. Hoskins, see D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
18. See, for instance, Robert Z. Melnick, *Cultural Landscapes: Rural Historic Districts in the National Park System* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1984); Melody Webb, “Cultural Landscapes in the National Park Service,” *The Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 77–89; and Charles A. Birnbaum, *Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes*, Preservation Brief no. 36 (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1994).
19. Edwin C. Bearss, “Historical Fence and Ground Cover Map, Part of the Master Plan, Stones River National Battlefield,” National Park Service, Division of Design and Construction, Eastern, 1962.
20. For a general treatment, see David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001). For a focused treatment of commemoration associated with Stones River National Battlefield, see Fraley, “The Politics of Memory.”
21. Michael Kammen was among the first to observe that one of the distinctive characteristics of collective memory in American culture is our “inclination to depoliticize the past in order to minimize memories (and causes) of conflict. This is how we healed the wounds of sectional animosity following this Civil War; and that is how we selectively remember only those aspects of heroes’ lives that will render them acceptable to as many people as possible.” See Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 701.
22. Terence Young, “A Contradiction in Democratic Government’: W.J. Trent, Jr., and the Struggle to Desegregate National Park Campgrounds,” *Environmental History* 14 (Oct-

- ober 2009): 651–682; Gretchen Sullivan Sorin, “*Keep Going*”: *African Americans on the Road in the Era of Jim Crow* (PhD Dissertation, State University of New York–Albany, 2009), 96–97, 144–146, 186.
23. General Authorities Act, 84 Stat. 825, August 18, 1970.
 24. Dwight F. Rettie, *Our National Park System: Caring for America’s Greatest Natural and Historic Treasures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 14.
 25. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, Part IV.
 26. Gilbert J. Backlund, “Patriotism on the Battlefield: The National Park Service and Mission 66 at Stones River” (Master’s thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2005) analyzes the 1960s re-development of Stones River National Battlefield in the context of Cold War politics and rhetoric.
 27. National Park Service, *The National Parks: Shaping the System* (Harpers Ferry, WV: National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center, 2005; rev. ed. of Barry Mackintosh, *The National Parks*, Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1991), 66.
 28. National Park Service, *The National Park System Plan, Part One: History* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1972). Ronald Foresta criticized the 1972 plan for providing Congress with a tool that it used freely “to turn national parks, especially historical ones, into distributive goods”; see Foresta, *America’s National Parks and Their Keepers* (Washington, DC: Resources for the Future, 1984), 272. Later assessments, however, have concluded that the plan was largely ignored by Congress, which never sanctioned it, as well as by NPS personnel because it was never subjected to external review; see Rettie, 16–17; Richard West Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 212. The role of Congress in relation to shaping the national park system over time remains understudied.
 29. National Park Service, *The National Parks: Index 2009–2011* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, Office of Public Affairs and Harpers Ferry Center, 2009). The index, which lists 391 national park units, does not include affiliate sites or the 49 heritage areas authorized by Congress between 1984, when the program began, and the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, signed into law March 30, 2009. As of this writing, 394 is the number of national parks generally given.
 30. *History in the National Park Service: Themes and Concepts*, a joint effort of the National Park Service, the Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, and the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History, ca. 1993, available online at http://www.nps.gov/history/history/hisnps/NPSThinking/themes_concepts.htm.
 31. Several parks interpret industrial and maritime history, including Lowell National Historical Park (NHP) (1978), San Francisco Maritime NHP (1988), Keweenaw NHP (1992), Dayton Aviation Heritage NHP (1992), and New Bedford Whaling NHP (1996). Nine new units are associated with African American history: Tuskegee Institute NHS (1974), Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site (NHS) (1978), Boston African American NHS (1980), Mary McLeod Bethune Council House NHS (1982, 1991), Brown v. Board of Education NHS (1992), Cane River Creole NHP (1994), Nicodemus NHS (1996). Little Rock Central High School NHS (1998), and Tuskegee

Airmen NHS (1998). Women's history is now interpreted at many parks, but several units are specifically associated with women's history. In addition to Maggie L. Walker and Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, they include Clara Barton NHS (1974), Eleanor Roosevelt NHS (1976), Women's Rights NHP (1980), and Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front NHP (2000). Likewise, World War II is interpreted at many parks, but Manzanar NHS (1992) and Minidoka Internment National Monument (2001) tell the stories of Japanese-American citizens who were held in internment camps during the war.

32. National Park System Advisory Board, *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 2001), 4.
33. See, for instance, Robin Winks, "Sites of Shame: Disgraceful Episodes from Our Past Should be Included in the Park System to Present a Complete Picture of Our History," *National Parks* (March/April 1994): 22–23; Rolf Diamant, "On the Banks of the Cane River: A Reflection on the Role of the National Park Service in Public Life and Civic Dialogue," *Journal of the Association of National Park Rangers* (Fall 2001); National Park Service, *The National Park Service and Civic Engagement: The Report of a Workshop Held December 6–8, 2001 in New York City* (Boston: National Park Service, Northeast Regional Office, 2002); Martin Blatt, "Introduction: The National Park Service and Civic Engagement," *The George Wright Forum* 19, no. 4 (2002) (special issue devoted to civic engagement at sites of conscience); and Ed Linenthal, "The National Park Service and Civic Engagement," *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 123–129 [reprinted in *The George Wright Forum* 25, no. 1 (2008): 7–11.
34. Robert K. Sutton, ed., *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War* (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National, 2001) contains essays by some of the more influential scholars—Ira Berlin, David Blight, Edward Linenthal, James McPherson, James Oliver Horton, Drew Gilpin Faust, and Eric Foner—who have encouraged and worked with the National Park Service to develop broader, more inclusive interpretations at Civil War sites.
35. Jabez T. Cox, "Civil War Diary of Jabez T. Cox," *Indiana Magazine of History* 28, no. 1 (March 1932): 40–54. The entry, dated June 4, 1864, states: "About 5 o'clock P.M. we left the fort [Fortress Rosecrans] and marched about neart 2 miles from the railroad bridge over stone River, to a fine grove northeast of the Town [Murfreesboro] near the contraband quarters."
36. *Ibid.* Cox's July 11, 1864, entry states: "we passed through two large fields of cotton it will soon be in bloom and the darkeys say there will be a fine crop it is all the property of uncle Sam the darkies are hired by the month there are several hundred acres of government cotton in this vicinity." On July 14, 1864, Cox wrote: "some of the 17th US Colored a portion of which is camped near our quarters passed through this evening they are all stout heartly looking soldiers".
37. *Ibid.*, August 25, 1864.
38. Ray Barnett, Marie Bourassa, Katie Merzbacher, and Brad Mitchell, "Cemetery Community Research Project: Group Five Team Findings Report" (HIST 6510/7510, Middle Tennessee State University, 2007). See also Michael T. Gavin, "Rutherford County's

- African American Soldiers During the Civil War: The 110th and 111th Regiments U.S.C.T.” (TMs, Heritage Center Collection, Middle Tennessee State University, 2007). The park interprets Holland’s life with a wayside exhibit—“Slave, Soldier, Citizen”—located near his grave.
39. H.P. Van Cleve, Brigadier General, US Forces, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, to Brigadier General W.D. Whipple, AAG, letter, June 21, 1865, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 105, Series T142, Roll 27.
 40. E.P. Hotchkiss, Treasury Department, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, to Major General Johnson, July 17, 1865, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 105, Series T142, Roll 26.
 41. Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed, 1860–1870: War and Peace in the Upper South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 185.
 42. Janet Hudson Goodrum, “Profile of Black Landownership in Rutherford County during Reconstruction” (Honor’s Thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 1989), 5–14, calculates that there were 2,800 African American heads of household in 1870, of which 140 owned real property.
 43. Avery [single name only], “The Battlefield of Stone River,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* 30, no. 27 (September 27, 1869). This information accords with a report by Freedmen’s Bureau agent J.K. Nelson, filed June 1868, in which he reported that, “The Klan in Rutherford County now numbers about 800 or 1000, has three or four lodges, and ... has the sympathy and encouragement of nearly all the white people.” Nelson, Monthly Report of Freedmen’s Affairs in the Nashville Sub Districts for the Month of June, 1868, Records of the Field Offices for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives and Records Administration, RG105, Series T142, Roll 41.
 44. Census data of 1870 and 1880 and Rutherford County property tax records of 1877–1880, compiled by Lydia Morehouse; see Morehouse, “Settling In: Tracking the Formation of Cemetery Community through Legal Documents” (Draft MA thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2011).
 45. Research completed to date suggests that one or two white landowners/speculators were the primary actors in these real estate transactions.
 46. Rural segregation has been variously documented in relation to spatial settlement patterns, economic activity, and community formation. See Peter C. Smith and Karl B. Raitz, “Negro Hamlets and Agricultural Estates in Kentucky’s Inner Bluegrass,” *Geographical Review* 64 no. 2 (April 1974): 217–234; John Kellogg, “The Formation of Black Residential Areas in Lexington, Kentucky, 1865–1887,” *Journal of Southern History* 48, no. 1 (February 1982): 21–52; Jill-Karen Yakubik, “Settlement and Occupation of the Chalmette Property,” in Jerome A. Greene, *Historic Resource Study: Chalmette Unit, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve* (New Orleans: National Park Service, September 1985); Steve Lerner, *Diamond: A Struggle for Environmental Justice in Louisiana’s Chemical Corridor* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005). Recent

scholarship on post-emancipation community formation in rural areas of the South includes Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Susan Eva O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Harvard University Press, 2007); and Allison Dorsey, "'The great cry of our people is land!' Black Settlement and Community Development on Ossabaw Island, Georgia, 1865–1900," in *African American Life in the Georgia Lowcountry: The Atlantic World and the Gullah Geechee*, Philip Morgan, ed. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

47. *Rally on the High Ground* led to *The Civil War Remembered: Official National Park Service Handbook*, John Latcher and Robert K. Sutton, eds. (Fort Washington, PA: Eastern National for the National Park Service, 2011). Additionally, in fall 2010 the NPS Southeast Region adopted a strategic plan for commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War by interpreting "serious messages, including slavery" at the more than 20 Civil War-related sites in the Region; see *150 Years: A Nation Divided, A Nation Reunited; and the First Steps on the Path to Full Citizenship for All Americans* (Atlanta: NPS Southeast Region, Fall 2010).
48. Some research data have been made publicly available online through Walker Library, Middle Tennessee State University; see Stones River Battlefield Historic Landscape Collection, <http://library.mtsu.edu/digitalprojects/stonesriver.php>.
49. A limited oral history project undertaken in 2007 was expanded in 2011 in collaboration with local residents who have familial ties to Cemetery Community or an interest in local African American history.
50. Mona Brittingham, Meghan Fall, Zada Law, and John Lynch, *Design Concepts for Historic Cemetery Community Wayside Exhibit, Stones River National Battlefield* (Murfreesboro: Middle Tennessee State University, Public History Program, May 2011).
51. Middle Tennessee State University Public History Program, *Listening to a Landscape: The Stories of Stones River National Battlefield*, portable exhibit developed by Elizabeth Goetsch with Elena DiGrado, Carolyn Powell, and Angela Smith in collaboration with Stones River National Battlefield, 2009. See also Elizabeth Goetsch, "'All Could Not Help But Feel It': Cultural Landscapes as Public History at Stones River National Battlefield," MA thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2011.

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