

The Confederate Monument Movement as a Policy Dilemma for Resource Managers of Parks, Cultural Sites, and Protected Places: Florida as a Case Study

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RENOWNED HISTORIAN IRA BERLIN recently published *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States*, a work that evolved partly from his contribution to a National Park Service (NPS) forum in 2000. In this study, Berlin meticulously examines the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction periods of American history and contextualizes them within current historiographical and public debates. In Berlin's view, "History is not about the past; it is about the arguments we have about the past." In particular, Berlin finds the ongoing debates about the commemoration of Confederate versions of history as much about present issues as past events.¹ The focus of this study is to contextualize Confederate monument movements and debates in Florida, the third most populous state, in order to demonstrate how resource managers often face dilemmas in their efforts to present issues of past events and current iconography accurately, in this case stemming from neo-Confederate demands for memorials based on the "Lost Cause" version of "Southern heritage." As a state indicative of Dixie, Florida offers a useful national microcosm of past and contemporary debates over neo-Confederate demands, often promulgated in unison with public and political allies, for controversial memorials to their version of Southern and national history. Florida also reflects what John Freemuth has identified as a deeply rooted dilemma for resource managers and staff, the "political versus professional determinants of policy."²

During Reconstruction, black Floridians experienced unprecedented optimism for racial uplift. Old South Florida, under the white Bourbon reactionaries, soon dashed these hopes. Indeed, the state had effectively reinstated its antebellum racial codes by the 1880s. Like other former Confederate states, Florida exercised white control through both legal and extra-legal means, often enforced through Klan intimidation or violence. In *The Invisible Em-*

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pire: *The Ku Klux Klan in Florida*, Michael Newton concluded that the state had a “130-year history as one of the Klan’s strongest and most violent realms...”³

By the dawn of the 20th century, Florida’s policymakers had orchestrated a Jim Crow society reflective of the South at large. When laws and codes did not suffice in their view, white power brokers turned to Klan violence well into the 20th century to force social, economic, and political dominion over blacks. In Florida, like most of the South, whites used lynching, or the constant threat of lynching, to lock black citizens into their “proper place.” The specter of mob violence and death constantly hung over Southern African-Americans. In its study, *Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror*, the Equal Justice Initiative documented almost 4,000 lynchings of blacks from 1877 to 1950 in the states south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Florida held the dubious distinction of leading Dixie in per-capita lynching for much of that time. Indeed, Phillip Dray established in his study of national lynching that Florida exited the 1930s with “the last of the big American spectacle lynchings.”⁴

Educators, historians, and resource managers have often traced the origin of Jim Crow segregation to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling of 1896. In fact, most of the South, including Florida, had institutionalized “separate but unequal” a decade or more in advance of *Plessy*. In the dust of the Supreme Court’s repudiation of racial equality in the South, Florida and many neighboring states moved to imbed imagery of the Confederacy in their state flags and monuments as commemoratives to Southern ideals. Thus, Florida, as in the South in general, undermined the promises of Reconstruction in favor of a society rooted in white supremacy and racial oppression as symbolized in Confederate valorizing in and over places of public space.

As the 20th century progressed, Confederate glorifiers ignored or subsumed the South’s Civil War defeat and racial oppression into their versions of history. Prime among the Southern revisionist history was the sentimental Lost Cause interpretation of faithful slaves and a virtuous South oppressed by Northern tyrants prior to and after the war. The only reason the Confederacy’s noble warriors suffered a humiliating defeat was that a vastly larger invading force from the North overwhelmed an ill-fated South. The president-general of the United Daughters of the Confederacy maintained that the “South surrendered to the weight of numbers,” but subsequently rose up to regard “our flag ‘with affectionate reverence and undying remembrance’.” A Virginian later captured the essence of the Lost Cause version of defeat, “They never whipped us, Sir, unless they were four to one. If we had had anything like a fair chance, or less disparity of numbers, we should have won our cause and established our independence.”⁵ Whereas white Southerners recalled their version of “whippings,” black Southerners recalled and passed on to their youth a decidedly different definition of whippings. The post-war Union occupying force, as the Lost Cause purports, resulted in a Reconstruction era during which ignoble Yankees and freedmen forced a corrupt and vindictive regime on an honorable but defeated people. This sentimentalization of history quickly seeped into the national culture and psyche of Americans through popular literature and such blockbuster, but historically inaccurate, movies as *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone With the Wind*. In short, the Civil War and Reconstruction took on the aura of a noble struggle for the South that the

vindictive Northern invader, with its carpetbagger and black allies, forced on a righteous yet subjugated people.⁶

Through historical misrepresentation, the Lost Cause, and its academic iteration, the so-called Dunning School, views of Southern history became popularized in the folklore and ideology of the white South and memorialized in the Southern symbolic use of the Battle Flag and the monument movement of the early 20th century to the present.⁷ In creating or demanding monuments to defiant Confederates in public spaces, the sons and daughters of the Confederacy, and their heirs and defenders, have sought to create permanent visual symbols to their historical visions of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Simply waving the Confederate Battle Flag on holidays and Confederate Memorial Day (now celebrated officially in seven Southern states) was not enough to satisfy those Americans who wanted to impose “selective” memory, as Ralph Ellison once termed it, on the public at large. As a past chronicler of monument movements concluded, “One of the major ceremonial events in ... the South was the dedication of monuments raised to the honor and memory of Confederate heroes.” He further found that in the absence of bona fide local heroes, Confederate memorializers simply dedicated generic monuments to the “Boys in Gray.”⁸

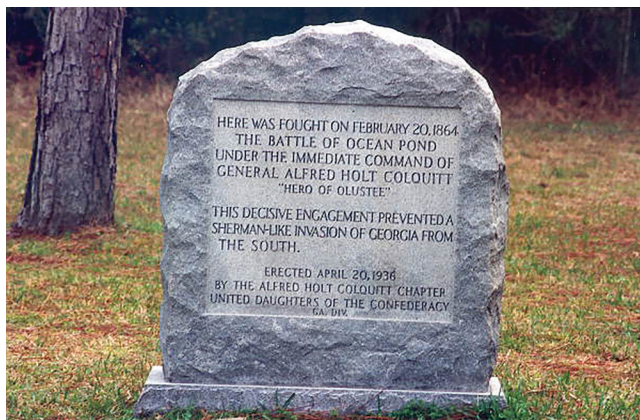
Thus sprouted the neo-Confederate movement to memorialize its Lost Cause narrative of history by converting public space into visual guardians of their adaptations of local and national history. Beginning in the 1970s with the publication of the *Southern Partisan* magazine, and growing in the 1990s as a result of the creation of the League of the South and the “New Dixie Manifesto,” the movement experienced a resurgence of the Lost Cause commemoration of history into what Euan Hague and Edward H. Sebesta termed the “curious acceptance of and relevance for the short-lived Confederacy and its legacy of racism and white supremacy.”⁹ As a corollary to the movement by Southerners to redefine history and public space, they adopted policies, often supported by political leaders of their states, that opposed not only Union narratives of the war and Reconstruction, but also any movements to honor the 360,000 Northerners who fought and died in America’s bloodiest war, many of whom had succumbed to wounds on Southern battlefields.¹⁰ As a result, for well over a century Floridians, and many Southerners in general, have debated the historical role and collective memory of their state’s local and national significance in the Civil War and Reconstruction and how to commemorate (glorify?) it. Florida offers a useful case study of this historical phenomenon.

William B. Lees and Frederick P. Gaske found in *Recalling Deeds Immortal: Florida Monuments to the Civil War* that the debate erupted in the wake of the conflict itself and has continued through the present day in various forms and venues, including the arguments for and placement of commemorative stone and bronze monuments in national and state parks. To date, neo-Confederate organizations have supported the placement of 100 monuments in the Sunshine State and eight in other states in which Florida forces fought and died. These monuments to Florida’s Confederate soldiers range as far north as Winchester, Virginia; their various iterations appear not only in parks, but in battlefields, cemeteries (some administered by the Department of Veteran’s Affairs), churches, forts, historic houses, lighthouses, military

buildings, museums, and railroad sites. Florida is not unusual among Southern states in creating these types of commemorations to the Confederacy (Figure 1).¹¹

The major architects of the monument movement to create and sustain the Lost Cause narrative in Florida will be familiar to historians and resource managers of sites in other former Confederate states. Those neo-Confederate groups are often proponents of, as J. Michael Martinez writes, a “romantic view of the South as a place where traditions and ideals intersect without encompassing racist views.”¹² This romanticized embodiment of Southern heritage is exemplified in the Lost Cause version of history by self-identified descendants of Confederate loyalists and combatants. Notably representative of these groups are the Ladies’ Memorial Associations, United Daughters of the Confederacy, United Confederate Veterans, Sons of Confederate Veterans, the Heritage Preservation Association, and a smattering of local “patriotic” groups, re-enactors, cemetery restorers, and, most recently, giant Confederate Battle Flag flyers on property adjacent to Southern interstate highways. Many of them seem to be motivated by the desire to foist their concept of historical relativism onto a general public that may not always share their viewpoints. J. Michael Martinez and William D. Richardson characterize these viewpoints in *Confederate Symbols in the Contemporary South* as “the South’s mythic past.” In analyzing these issues, Martinez and Richardson defined the crux of the problem as “the act of honoring the values supposedly symbolized by the Confederacy (and commemorated by a sign such as a flag or a monument) that perpetuates conflict owing to differences in interpreting those values.... Were this not the case, it would be a relatively simple proposition to [satisfy] all parties.”¹³ While commenting on the Confederate flag issue in particular, noted journalist and historian Eliot Kleinberg recently summed up the acrimony of neo-Confederate memorializing in general: “Where does that Confederate flag go? It might well be the most divisive symbol in all of America. Does it stand for hatred or heritage?”¹⁴ Soon after Kleinberg’s challenge, the *New York Times* addressed the issue in a hard-hitting editorial, “Confederate Memorials as Instruments of Racial Terror.”¹⁵ The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) reacted even more demonstrably by reiterating its historical condemnation of any displays of Confederate flags or memorials in or above public lands or places of public space and leisure.¹⁶

Figure 1. United Daughters of the Confederacy monument (erected 1936) at Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park, Florida. Courtesy of the State Archives of Florida.



Ironically, the first monument appeared in Florida in 1866 under a Union flag to commemorate the Northern casualties of the bloody battle of Olustee (or Ocean Pond to the Confederates) on February 20, 1864. Subsequently, reactionary Floridians excoriated the commemorative work and created numerous monuments to commemorate their own dead and wounded (Figure 2). In the process, they contested the placement of any proposed Union-orientated monuments. The latest incident occurred at Olustee in 2013 as the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War attempted to erect a commemorative marker at the Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park, long considered a place of special veneration by Southern heritage groups and other neo-Confederates.¹⁷

The Sons of Confederate Veterans took their opposition to a sympathetic state legislature, arguing that the proposed Union construction was nothing more than a “special monument to invading Federal forces ... that will disrupt the hallowed grown [sic] where Southern blood was spilled in defense of Florida.” As reported recently in the *New York Times* article, “Blue and Gray Still in Conflict at a Battle Site: Monument for Union Troops Draws Fire,” the debate over the placement of a proposed Union monument near the Confederate one at Olustee underscored the present tensions and arguments over Florida’s and the South’s role to exculpate themselves from an embarrassing Civil War defeat.¹⁸ In addressing the issue of resource managers in its state

Figure 2. United Daughters of the Confederacy monument (erected 1912) at Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park, Florida. Courtesy of the State Archives of Florida.



having to face similar dilemmas of approving and sustaining Confederate monuments, the *Chicago Tribune* stated, “what to do with Confederate monuments will not be quick and or easy. But it’s clear the status quo is not sustainable.” The paper added that park and site visitors “should not be expected to endure publicly sanctioned symbols that glorify” the Southern interpretations of history alone.¹⁹ As suggested in the *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times* articles, these are present and growing issues affecting local, state, and national park services that may frustrate resource managers and perplex segments of the public at large.

Moreover, the issue of Confederate monument placements has created a quandary for the administrators of contemporary park services as they address the interpreta-

tion of “human history ... [as] an educational service” in their management goals—should they accede to the demands of neo-Confederates to the placement of their icons and heroes of Southern heritage, or reject them on the grounds of their being historically inaccurate and racially insensitive? In regard to the latter option, the decision-making of park officials regarding historical memory is often complicated by partisan “memory brokers” and “competing interests,” as two relevant studies have termed them, and the presumed or promised backlash of local and national politicians sympathetic to these modern iterations of the Lost Cause.²⁰ Kimberly J. Bodey and Nathan A. Schaumleffel in their study, “Politics and Advocacy,” warn park management that the all-too-often mixing of public policy and decision-making “can be fraught with confusion, contradiction and consternation.” In his study on the evolution of, and politics behind, the creation, rejection, or modification of monuments, *America’s National Monuments: The Politics of Preservation*, public historian Hal Rothman challenged his readers to understand that many monuments arose from “the vision of a few that has become a generally held social objective.”²¹ This historical and modern confluence of public vision existing in the shadow of social objective often places resource, site, and park professionals in sensitive assessment dilemmas as they deliberate the appropriateness of proposed Confederate monuments (and flags and buildings) to their spaces of public trust and their mission, as the National Park Service notes, “to discover American history in all its diversity.”²²

In the case of the Confederate Battle Flag, many state politicians in the South have quietly removed the symbol from public view. As the governor of South Carolina noted after the state removed the flag from the capitol following a deadly shooting at a black church in Charleston, “The fact it [the flag] causes pain to so many is enough to move it from capitol grounds.”²³ Almost in unison with South Carolina’s tempering of the Confederate symbol, the National Park Service issued a statement requesting that superintendents voluntarily remove Confederate flag memorabilia for sale to further NPS’s mission “to tell the complete story of America.” Not long after this, however, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the governor of Louisiana, with the support of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, sought to prevent the removal of Confederate symbols and monuments from public space in his state. This resulted in a heated debate between supporters and opponents of Confederate statuary and tributes in the state that transcended the decision-making authority of resource managers in favor of political solutions. The politicization of the debate has ensured that the issue of monument placement would remain at the level of state and local public spheres despite some Southern states’ rejections of Confederate symbols.²⁴

While high-placed politicians may have the authority to unilaterally decide the fate of symbols of Southern heritage in public spaces, resource managers are often required to base such policy decisions on a web of bureaucratic and public input processes. Not only do resource professionals of public trust have to decide the appropriateness of the subject matter as transmitters of historical viewpoints, but, as highly trained professionals, they must also weigh the possible unintended consequences of Confederate iconography and structures on the historical interpretations adopted by out-of-region and even out-of-country visitors. This may be a perplexing problem for state and national resource managers who face not only pressure to approve more Confederate monuments, but sometimes equal pressure, such as

the case in Louisiana, not to remove Confederate flags and memorials. By the late 20th century, in the Deep South there were 352 monuments, or nearly 20% of all monuments, devoted to the remembrance or commemoration of the Confederacy. Concurrently, the National Park Service oversaw 233 Confederate memorials at such sites as Antietam and Gettysburg.²⁵ Simply stated, many site visitors depend on resource professionals to adopt and enact operational procedures that properly and fairly portray events and persons as historically accurate commemorative symbols. Often this proves to be a difficult, time-consuming, and controversial process for addressing the appropriateness of neo-Confederate memorials and related matter in parks and public sites.

In the case of the National Park Service, by way of example, proposed Civil War commemorative works must be supported by “compelling justification,” “be authorized by legislation,” and “include public participation” as authorized in the Administrative Procedure Act.²⁶ While this may partly de-politicize the selection process in national battlefields and parks, resource managers at state and local parks may face a more daunting approval process that is often influenced and funded by pressure groups, bureaucrats, and politicians sympathetic to the Lost Cause folklore. This issue rose to national attention in the 1990s when the protests over the “Faithful Slave” monument (the Hayward Shepherd monument) at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park caused a conundrum for NPS (Figure 3). Confederate support groups and the NAACP clashed over the idealism of the work, particularly the inscription which reads, in part, “exemplifying the character and faithfulness of thousands of negroes.” At first, NPS responded to protests of the imagery of a “Faithful Slave” by shielding it. When both sides rejected that, NPS pursued another solution to the issue (by then national in scope) by sanctioning a counter-display contextualized within the historical and scholarly parameters of the depiction.²⁷ Resource managers might look to this example for guidance to their own similar monument and site dilemmas, but NPS’s resolution of the “Faithful Slave” may not always be adaptable to local circumstances.

The balancing act of enacting proper and accepted operational procedures has become even more challenging of late for commemorative professionals and park staffers, as many states have transferred their oversight and funding functions from conventional park, heritage, and preservation services to different state departments, such as interior and environmental services. Finally, plans to approve or disapprove contested monuments such as those devoted to the Lost Cause and Southern heritage are often subject to feedback from advisory groups (often composed of elected officials or their appointees), public meetings, and workshops. The result of this frequently vitiates site managers’ guidelines and prerogatives, as local and state priorities take precedence over issues of historical accuracy and racial sensitivity. In this case, NPS’s guidelines for compelling cause and/or authorizing legislation become problematic—how do park and site managers satisfy all constituencies while ensuring historical accuracy and racial sensitivity in their efforts to approve or create visual symbols to the past? Moreover, what is the proper place of Confederate physical objects and buildings in the promotional imagery of parks and sites, and how can this imagery affect park managers’ relationships, often based on park themes, with land uses or proposed land uses (i.e., development) around their sites?²⁸ Again, this managerial dilemma is not only rooted in historical

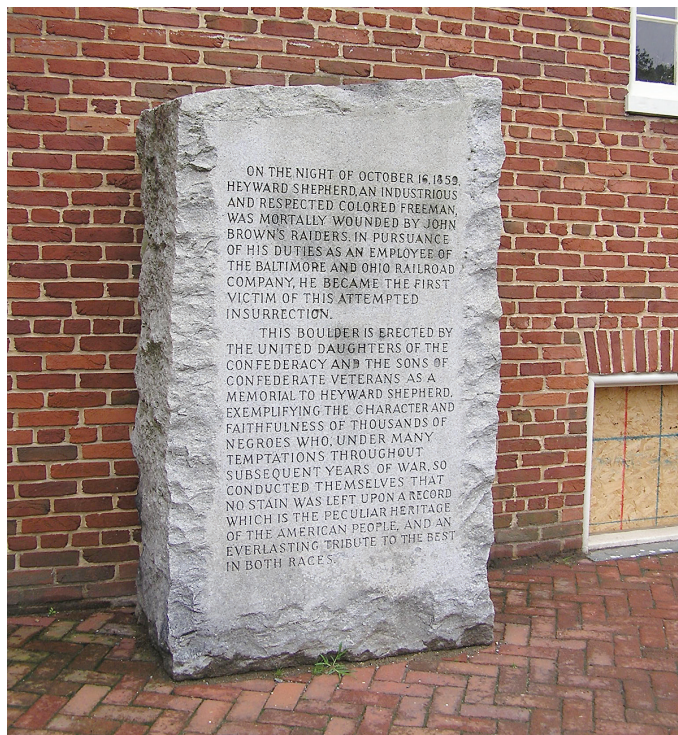


Figure 3. The “Faithful Slave” monument, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Photo courtesy of lcm1863 via Wikimedia Commons.

relativism, but also in the historical “reality” visitors, and even local residents, place on these symbols of past events. To neglect these challenges of historical memory and interpretations would imbue a certain irony to Voltaire’s famous dictum, “History is nothing but a pack of tricks the living play upon the dead.”

In addressing the historical and physical presence of these monuments, and proposed monuments, state and national constituencies are often adamant in their positions. That is, both camps argue that history is on their side. This presents even more conundrums for policy-makers and the public at large. As Lees and Gaske point out about extant and proposed monuments, “Many of these are, of course, embodiments of the Lost Cause narrative, but they are also eloquent sentinels of a significant period in our history....”²⁹ The suggestion that neo-Confederate monuments are, in fact, “eloquent sentinels” is a question of some concern for contemporary America. Yale scholar David W. Blight has written volumes of acclaimed works about the historical permutations of Civil War commemorating, and how ownership of the era and its legacy has proved fluid across time. Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage, writing in the *Journal of Southern History*, finds the debate simply part of the new “memory industry” contemporary Americans must maneuver through in their quest to know the past. In *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*, James W. Loewen

captured the historical versus modern demands for depictions in resource spheres: “Historic Sites Are Always a Tale of Two Eras.” He might have added that historical eras shape historic sites, as well. Edward Tabor Linenthal in his book, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields*, also finds that the fluid memory of martial losses has transformed battle sites in both sacred and disturbing ways over time.³⁰ His study is useful for noting that the physical commemoration of contested interpretations of such historical episodes as the Civil War and Reconstruction can profoundly influence the views of those events by new generations of park and cultural site visitors. And herein lies the contemporary challenge for state and national park services—how to balance missions supported by public funding and oversight with interpretive physical portrayals of history?

Conclusion

Most Americans interpret past events through the written word and visual symbols. This presents a sometimes difficult challenge for resource managers of parks, cultural sites, and protected places as they are increasingly forced to navigate a decision-making process through interest groups, many of which have now become politicized through the adoption of ideology over facts-based and inclusive history. As the case study of Florida demonstrates, this dilemma today is perhaps best represented by the placement and naming, or requested placement and naming, of Confederate monuments and iconography in locations of public space and cultural preservation. While certain Confederate efforts to memorialize their ancestors may be reasonable as policy decisions (e.g., in cemeteries and at battle sites), many past and contemporary neo-Confederates’ efforts to memorialize their version of the Civil War era are drawn from, and justified in their arguments by, the Lost Cause version of history and its corollary, the contemporary narrative of Southern heritage. Inherent in this version of the past are, however, the counterpoints of interest groups that argue that the rubric of Southern heritage distorts the true history of our nation by ignoring—or worse, commemorating—racial injustice and bigotry. While resource professionals routinely face an array of proposals to retain, create, or remove site displays, arguably the present-day demands for or against Confederate memorialization are as perplexing and challenging as any they need to resolve for their sites. It is, therefore, useful for resource professionals to understand, as reflected in the case study of Florida, that memories of the past are now based not only on interpretations but also romanticized and politicized viewpoints that frequently complicate their work.

Unlike many private sites of eco-conservation, resource managers of public spaces are also agents of public trust in terms of fairly and accurately portraying the historical record—they are held by the public and their profession to the highest standards of decision-making in regard to the selection and protection of symbols of the past. Once a park service has satisfied its guidelines and management policies on contested exhibits and places its imprimatur on them, the public will often internalize that work as an accurate portrayal of past events. That is, the public will shape its memory of the past based on an act of faith that park and site professionals have not allowed biased or romanticized representations of historic events, causation, and outcomes. In this regard, the nation at large has invested trust in resource managers to eschew one-sided portrayals of history in favor of accurate and balanced depic-

tions of the past. In their efforts to ensure accuracy and balance in approving or maintaining displays and symbols of yesteryear, resource personnel must be aware of the consequences today of supporting, rejecting, or modifying displays or symbols of the Lost Cause version of history. So politicized have these and corresponding issues become in certain states of Dixie that final decisions on these actions may well engender public and political controversy, such as the one at the Olustee battlefield site in 2013 that resulted in state legislative action and national coverage in such newspapers as the *New York Times*.

In the final analysis, resource professionals must identify and articulate to the public and pressure groups a compelling, extraordinary, *and* defensible justification for their decisions and actions regarding Confederate monuments and symbols, and realize that the public, the media, and politicians might question or criticize their actions. Simply stated, the inevitable public debates between vested interests in promulgating memories of the Civil War era and the efforts to preserve and reinterpret them are deeply ingrained in the American psyche and will continue to complicate the judgments of resource managers for generations to come. While the contemporary challenges of preserving, creating, contextualizing, and recontextualizing memory of Confederate-oriented displays and commemorations certainly presents a challenge to their decision-making, resource managers might realize, as well, that such contemporary challenges also represent an opportunity to validate the public confidence with which they have been entrusted.

Acknowledgments

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26. National Park Service, “9.6 Commemorative Works and Plaques,” and “9.6.1 General,” *Management Policies 2006* (Washington, DC: US Department of the Interior/US Government Printing Office, 2006), 140; National Park Service, “May the Public Participate in Policy-Making?,” Things to Know ... About National Park Service’s Policy and the Directive System, <http://www.nps.gov/policy/DOrders/thingstoknow.htm> (accessed December 6, 2015).
27. Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2003), 103–110; quotation in “Tribute to Victim of Brown’s Raid Still Controversial,” *Baltimore Sun*, September 3, 1995; Paul A. Shackel, “Hayward Shepherd: The Faithful Slave Memorial,” *Historical Archaeology* 37:3 (2003), 138–148; Mary Johnson, “An ‘Ever Present Bone of Contention’: The Heyward Shepherd Memorial,” *West Virginia History* 56 (1997), 1–26.
28. See, for example, Cory R. Davis and Andrew J. Hansen, “Trajectories in Land Use Change Around U.S. National Parks and Challenges and Opportunities for Management,” *Ecological Applications* 21:8 (December 2011), 3299–3316.
29. Lees and Gaske, *Recalling Deeds Immortal*, xvi.
30. See, in particular, David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “Contentious and Collected: Memory’s Future in Southern History,” *Journal of Southern History* 75:3 (2009), 751–766; James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 36–45; Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

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