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"The Spectre of Savagery:" Interpreting Racial Violence at Civil War State Parks

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“THE SPECTRE OF SAVAGERY:” INTERPRETING RACIAL VIOLENCE AT CIVIL WAR STATE PARKS

A Dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History The University of Mississippi

by

BOYD R. HARRIS

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ABSTRACT

The legacy of the Lost Cause influenced the development of Civil War battlefield state parks throughout the South during the Twentieth Century. Focusing on battlefields which demonstrated racial violence between white Confederate soldiers and black Union soldiers provides clarity on this ubiquitous narrative in white southern society. The history of the battles of Olustee, Poison Spring, Jenkins’ Ferry, and Fort Pillow provided a direct contrast to white southern accounts of the war and emphasized the role of slavery and racial hatred. The success of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s prompted many state parks to include more of the African American narrative at these sites. Self-proclaimed defenders of the Lost Cause urged state park officials and legislators to repute new interpretations as inconsistent from the original purpose of the site, which brings into focus the changing purpose of these sites in a changing southern society. The resulting controversies created by these changes offers an insight into how the shared authority of state historic sites, between state officials, heritage organizations, academia, and the public, controlled the interpretation presented at historic sites. The advancements in historical scholarship, state park operations, and public history constantly challenge traditional narratives, but the shared authority and local nature of the state park often provided a substantial barrier toward presenting new scholarship to the public. At the heart of this debate lay the uncomfortable realities of racial violence and the inability of either side to express a shared vision of the past.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on the conclusion of the Civil War sesquicentennial, Kevin Levin commented that “it is hard to deny that historians and rangers at Civil War sites across the country now enjoy a level of intellectual freedom unanticipated just a few short years ago.”1 The prominence of current scholarship, particularly at national historic sites, marked a drastic difference from the centennial and one twenty-fifth observances. Those events stressed a tone of reconciliation between North and South and emphasized the shared experiences of martial valor and sacrifice, while downplaying the role of slavery and race. The inclusion of the African American experience within Civil War interpretations, widely accepted in academic scholarship following the Civil Rights Movement, dominated sesquicentennial events from 2010 to 2015 on the federal level. This was in part due to legislation, passed by Congress in 2000, that “direct[ed] the Secretary of the Interior to encourage Civil War battle sites to recognize and include in all of their public displays and multi-media educational presentations the unique role that the institution of slavery played in causing the Civil War and its role, if any, at the individual battle sites.”2 This directive, and subsequently the overarching theme of the sesquicentennial, does not

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2 The full text: “The managers recognize that Civil War battlefields throughout the country hold great significance and provide vital historic educational opportunities for millions of Americans. The managers are concerned, however, about the isolated existence of these Civil War battle sites in that they are often not placed in the proper historical context. The Service does an outstanding job of documenting and describing the particular battle at any given site, but in the public displays and multi-media presentations, it does not always do a similarly good job of documenting and describing the historical social, economic, legal, cultural and political forces and events that originally led to the larger war which eventually manifested themselves in specific battles. In particular, the Civil War battlefields are often weak or missing vital information about the role that the institution of slavery played in causing the American Civil War. The managers direct the Secretary of the Interior to encourage Civil War battle
represent a final victory over earlier interpretations at Civil War historic sites. Instead it reflects the continuing one hundred and fifty year process of remembering and forgetting undertaken within the nation’s collective memory of the war. That process is especially evident at those sites of violence scattered across the southern landscape commemorated as battlefield state parks.

State-owned Civil War battlefields provide a vantage point to better understand the responsibility of historic sites confronted by interpretational challenges to their overall narrative. Individual southern states commemorated Civil War battlefields during the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century’s with little or no emphasis on reconciliation, instead focusing on the fidelity of southern soldiers and the propagation of the Lost Cause interpretation in which the war was fought to defend constitutional principles, the home, and family.3 Unlike the law passed by the federal government in 2000 for national parks, no overarching legislation could challenge the traditional Lost Cause narrative at these state battlefields. Instead the impetus for change occurred through other means: the social changes created by the Civil Rights Movement and the professionalization in the field of interpretation within state park agencies. The successes of the Civil Rights Movement created an opportunity for different interpretations to be included at historic sites. Beginning in the 1970s, many individuals within southern state park agencies encouraged independent reexaminations of interpretation at most state owned Civil War sites to include more emphasis on the African American experience during the war.4 Interpretational

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training for park employees and the emergence of public history as an academic field during that
decade also meant that the reliance upon traditional narratives at historic sites through earlier
memorialization would no longer suffice.\textsuperscript{5} New narratives delivered by static exhibit panels,
audio-visual devices, or in person signaled a departure from earlier commemorations and toward
a more rounded educational experience for the visitor.

Adapting to new narratives impacts all historic sites to some degree, but the changes
introduced to Civil War scholarship in the past fifty years dramatically challenged the original
commemorative purpose at most southern Civil War historic sites. Moreover, the longevity of
the Lost Cause within most southern communities presented a powerful obstacle to any kind of
change in the interpretation of a historic event. State park agencies responded in uneven and
idiosyncratic ways, while also encountering difficult questions concerning the history of race and
violence at these sites. These attempts to alter the interpretation provide a better understanding
of the challenges faced by historic sites.

Central to the argument is the previously unexamined role of southern state park agencies
as official caretakers of historic sites and the contestation of that responsibility throughout the
Twentieth Century by individuals within the state park system, state government, and the public.
The institutional background of each state park agency, unfettered by federal legislation and
promoted as an alternative to an overworked National Park Service, allowed for the continuation
of the Lost Cause narrative well beyond its acceptance among most academic scholars. Attempts

\textsuperscript{5} The emergence of public history as an academic field occurred in the 1970s. See David Glassberg, \textit{Sense of
History: The Place of the Past in American Life} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Michael
Kammen, \textit{Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture} (New York: Vintage
Books, 1993). For a different argument, which places the roots of the field of public history in the early Twentieth
Century within the emerging National Park Service, see Denise D. Meringolo, \textit{Museums, Monuments, and National
to challenge that narrative often encountered stiff opposition from the local population and heritage organizations between the 1970s and the sesquicentennial.

Caught between a growing culture war, southern state park agencies confronted an existential dilemma concerning their Civil War battlefields. State parks, much like national parks, are political creations albeit existing in very different political arenas. Historic sites are created through legislation on the state level, resulting in a protected area deemed to be of importance to the state’s history. Overwhelmingly, southern state Civil War sites promoted the legacy of the Confederacy and its struggle against the federal government through most of the twentieth century. Defenders of this interpretation often pointed to the original purpose of state parks and argued they existed solely as promoters of the state, indicating separate spheres for state history and national history.

The role of shared authority is important in understanding the power of local influence at each site. Popularized by Michael Frisch, shared authority promotes the need for historic sites to “respect, understand, invoke, and involve the very real authority their audiences bring” in order to “provide a meaningful engagement with history.”6 Most of these southern battlefield parks easily implemented shared authority during the early part of their existence, when the audience and park organization was almost exclusively white southerners. Dissenting voices were silenced through various means under Jim Crow, but could no longer be silenced following the success of the Civil Rights Movement. The inclusion of more voices, according to Frisch, would “promote a more democratized and widely shared historical consciousness, consequently encouraging broader participation in debates about history, debates that will be informed by a

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more deeply representative range of experiences, perspectives, and values.” Unfortunately, those debates would not be easy in many of these southern communities and the state park agencies were ill prepared to engage in these debates. In spite of the acceptance of new interpretations by educators and scholars, each state park confronted an established Lost Cause interpretation rooted in the site’s creation and the culture of the state that controlled it. Challenging that interpretation inherently questioned the very purpose of each site’s existence, and to a larger extent, the fundamental issues of the war for white southerners.

Nowhere is this more evident, than at Civil War battlefields where acts of racial violence occurred. This work will examine the creation and development of four Civil War battlefield state parks: Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park, Poison Springs Battleground State Park, Jenkins’ Ferry Battleground State Park, and Fort Pillow State Historic Park. All of these parks commemorate a battle that occurred between February and April 1864, between white Confederate soldiers and black Union troops, and during which wounded or captured soldiers were killed by the enemy because of their race. Each battle resulted in a Confederate victory, with three of them (Olustee, Poison Springs, and Jenkins’ Ferry) receiving commemorative markers by local UDC groups in the early Twentieth Century. Beginning in the 1970s all of these parks sought to incorporate more interpretation about black soldiers and racial violence. The public response toward these changes illustrated the durability of traditional narratives among the local white populace and an unwillingness to include interpretations that did not solely honor the Confederate soldiers. State park agencies inherited not only the historic site, but also the local traditions and commemorative celebrations.

A closer examination at the creation and development of these four state historic sites presents a new perspective about the American Civil War, less seen at national battlefield parks.

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7 Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xxii.
Every skirmish and battle between black Union soldiers and Confederate forces contained rumors and allegations of atrocities, leveled at both black and white troops. Black soldiers represented the fear of slave rebellions in the minds of white southerners, events punished with extreme violence on the part of whites during the antebellum period. Combat during the war represented the southern fear and hatred of armed black soldiers, as conflicts between black and white soldiers occurred with an intensity not seen at other Civil War battles. Fort Pillow was the most famous of these incidents and its place within public memory as a battle or a massacre continues to be debated. The difficulty faced by sites of racial violence lies within the inability of Lost Cause devotees to reconcile the racial causes and consequences of the war, particularly in a post-Civil Rights Movement landscape.8

The difficult nature of discussing racial violence appears as the central issue at each site. Interpretational debates concerning the victims, perpetrators, and the assignment of culpability points to David Lowenthal’s assertion that “memory not only conserves the past but adjusts recall to current needs.”9 The absence of any mention of racial violence at the older sites, such as Olustee, signified the homogeneous nature of white southern society during the first half of the twentieth century and its domination of black southern society. The emergence of counter-interpretations occurred following the Civil Rights Movement in the 1970s, which coincided with the enhancement in park programs through professional park interpreters, museum exhibits, and signage. Reliance upon older memorials and traditions faded, as state parks utilized current

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scholarship to reassess the role of battles not only within the context of the war, but also within the larger social history of the nation.

The common thread for all four sites was the southern state park agencies’ reaction to the success of the Civil Rights Movement. State parks integrated alongside busses, restaurants, and movie theatres following the demise of segregation throughout the South. Along with the demands of a more diverse audience as visitors, several park agencies sought to include more of the African American experience at historic sites. The acceptance of African Americans into the national collective identity, according to Rebecca Kook, correlated to the inclusion of the African American experience in the American historical narrative. That inclusion directly contrasted the traditional Lost Cause narrative of the Civil War, specifically when applied to battlefields.10

Critics denounced the “political correctness” of state park agencies and disagreed with the perceived shift away from traditional commemoration, an opinion which reflected the entrenched purpose of Civil War battlefields within American society. As one of the most prominent historic sites in the public mind, battlefields represented a “sacred patriotic space where memories of the transformative power of war and the sacrificial heroism of the warrior are preserved.”11 Reuben M. Rainey referred to the memorialization of entire battlefield landscapes as “a uniquely American luxury.”12 The first nationally recognized Civil War battlefield parks - Chickamauga and Chattanooga in 1890, Shiloh in 1894, Gettysburg in 1895, and Vicksburg in 1899 - were established by Congress “for historical and professional study and also to serve as

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lasting memorials to the great armies of both sides.”13 During ceremonies and veteran’s reunions on these national battlefields, the theme of reconciliation between white northerners and southerners overshadowed the wartime contributions of African Americans and led these sites to emphasize the shared experience of white combatants on both sides. According to Paul Shackel and David Blight, the idea of equal veneration toward participants of both sides allowed North and South to find a common link at sites of such terrible fighting and suffering.14 Therefore when challenges appeared that countered traditional narratives, the response by many people echoed that of the founder of the Civil War Round Table Associates, Jerry Russell, who stated succinctly in 2002 that “battlefields are about honor.”15

At the state and local level, however, equal veneration rarely occurred. Scholarship has challenged the overall acceptance of the reconciliation narrative by northerners and southerners through several means. John R. Neff’s work on the burial and remembrance of Civil War dead emphasized lingering bitterness and animosity between northerners and southerners. Likewise, Robert Hunt’s examination of veterans of the Army of the Cumberland uncovered a strong emancipationist memory among survivors that championed preservation of the Union through the destruction of slavery. Hunt’s description of Union veterans upheld an argument for a defiant northern memory of the war, labeled by Neff as the “Cause Victorious,” that rejected the predominance of the Lost Cause narrative. In the past few years, additional studies on the limits of reconciliation and the difficulties of creating a unified national Civil War narrative have been published by Robert J. Cook and Caroline E. Janney. The establishment of Civil War battlefield

15 Jerry L. Russell, “Refighting the Civil War: Park Service wants to talk about Causes,” Arkansas Democrat Gazette, October 20, 2002, 6J.
parks by southern states overwhelmingly expressed veneration towards only Confederate soldiers.¹⁶

The role of the individual southern states in perpetuating the Lost Cause interpretation of the Civil War has also been well documented by scholars such as Fitzhugh Brundage. The establishment of state archives, as well as monuments in courthouse squares and on battlefields, provided legitimacy to the Lost Cause narrative in the early twentieth century.¹⁷ State legislation, funds, and agencies were directed toward the preservation and commemoration of the Civil War by many southern states.

The professionalization of the history field accompanied that of state archives and museums. The first generation of professional historians produced several works that reinforced the current notions on race and supported the ideals of white supremacy. While often acknowledging slavery as a cause of the Civil War, these historians also described the institution in very benign and paternalistic terms. Slave owners and other white Americans received most of the focus of these early histories that utilized mostly white written primary sources. The Dunning School, named after William A. Dunning at Columbia University, legitimized the Lost Cause interpretation among academic historians. Their scholarship depicted a unified white South in defense of home, honor, and constitutional principles against an aggressive North led astray by radical abolitionists. Black southerners, nearly all enslaved, participated in the war as faithful servants to their white masters and families. The impact of the Dunning School on


¹⁷ Brundage argues that the push by veterans and heritage organizations in the late Nineteenth Century toward establishing state funded archives created “reliquaries of the Lost Cause.” For more information on the establishment of archives in southern states see Brundage, The Southern Past, 122-135.
academic scholarship about the Civil War and its consequences lasted until World War II, but vestiges of it have remained influential in American society.¹⁸

A growing acceptance among scholars of the African American contributions during the Civil War emerged after World War II alongside the nascent formation of the Civil Rights Movement. Sociologists and anthropologists, such as Franz Boas, started dismantling the pseudo-scientific arguments for racism during the 1930s. The contrast between Germany’s racial policies and the service of African Americans during World War II further demonstrated the fallacy of earlier racial theories. As a result more historians began seriously questioning the earlier interpretations of slavery and the Civil War by the Dunning School.

Scholarship on the African American experience during the Civil War, particularly their military role, emerged during the 1950s. Benjamin Quarles and Dudley T. Cornish released works in 1953 and 1956 respectively. Cornish’s The Sable Arm directly links the participation of United States Colored Troops (USCT) and black state regiments to the Union’s victory and later achievements for equality, such as the Fourteenth Amendment.¹⁹

The success of the Civil Rights Movement, along with the diffusion of the New Social History in academia, challenged the dominance of the white southern, “Lost Cause” interpretation in southern public spaces during the 1960s. For example the Museum of the Confederacy, located in the former residence of Jefferson Davis in Richmond, Virginia, changed its mission in 1969 to include more information and exhibits on slavery, women, and Unionist activity during the war. The traditional mission, which had focused on southern military leaders

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and planters, expanded in hopes of becoming, as one board member said, “the museum of the Confederacy, not for the Confederacy.”

The shift at the Museum of the Confederacy preempted a changing role for historians and their interaction with the public, specifically in the professionalization of public history. The economic downturn of the 1970s in the United States created a need for historian jobs outside of academia and led to the emergence of public history programs at several universities. According to Denise D. Meringolo, the field of public history recognized a need “to identify practical applications for intellectual work” by historians because the economy could no longer support only the production of tenure-track academics. The growth of public history in academia during the 1970s and 1980s provided an outlet for the employment of trained historians outside of the university while still providing individuals with a foundation in historical research and analysis. Professional organizations, such as the Society for Historians in the Federal Government and the National Council on Public History, both created in 1980, stimulated the development of a professional public history field. The academic field of public history has grown exponentially since the 1970s, with nearly 110 academic programs available in the United States as of 2008.

The influx of professionally trained public historians also encountered reinvigorated southern state park agencies during the 1970s, with an emphasis on better education and professional interpretation at their historic sites. That environment, which was also influenced by the post Civil Rights Movement acceptance of diversity in employment, visitors, and historical focus, provided the impetus for state parks to advance different interpretations at their historic sites and challenge the traditional narratives. How southern state park agencies achieved

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20 Brundage, The Southern Past, 298.
this position requires some background on the formation of the state park movement during the
twentieth century and its relationship with the National Park Service.

Nascent state park agencies appeared throughout the nation during the 1880s through the
1910s, often focused initially on one specific site. The purchase of property by the state often
carried with it no further allowance for conservation, interpretation, or protection. Despite
several state park agencies pointing to the purchases of property in the late nineteenth century, it
would not be until the 1920s that most states recognized a need for an organized system of
parks.²² It would not really be until the after the establishment of the National Park Service in
1916 that individual states seriously considered establishing a state park system under the
direction of one state agency.

The growth of these agencies during the first half of the twentieth century was dissimilar,
with the exception being their relationship toward the National Park Service. The development
of state parks often imitated the National Park Service, but ultimately each state produced an
individualistic park system. Ney C. Landrum, a former Director of the Florida Park Service,
succinctly identified the key divergence between state parks and the national parks:

There are substantial differences between the states and the United States in scope and
capabilities, of course, but the real reason they cannot be directly compared is because the
fifty individual states themselves are too diverse in every way...each state, for reasons it
has deemed entirely sufficient, has chosen to define its mission and pursue its program in
its own way.²³

Landrum’s overall argument highlights the inconsistent development of individual state park
systems across the country during the twentieth century. Most state parks emerged as a result of
Progressive reforms of conservation and preservation. The dominance of the national park

²² The Texas Legislature set aside ten acres near the San Jacinto Battleground in 1883 and The Niagara Reservation
State Park was established in 1885. Both sites are claimed as the “first” state parks, even though neither were
organized under a state park agency until the 1920s. Landrum, *State Park Movement*, 39.
system, with its federal mandate “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects” and organization, left a lasting impression on the provincial identity of state parks.24 States now vied for recognition of their scenic and historic areas as national parks because of the funding and significance that accompanied such a designation. The development of a National Park Service had the unintended consequence of providing different state park agencies with a purpose while also providing an example to follow.

While many state parks hoped to emulate the national park system in organization, focus, and funding, a distinction between a national and state role emerged immediately upon the formation of the National Park Service. Stephen T. Mather immediately received a flurry of park site recommendations from Congress when he assumed the role of National Park Service Director in 1917. The dependence of the fledgling NPS on congressional funding resulted in Mather’s job being consumed by political wrangling. Mather developed criteria, along with consultation from the Department of the Interior, to only establish parks that were “extraordinary or unique as to be of national interest and importance.”25 Needless to say, the majority of new park submissions from Congress did not fit those requirements. In 1921, Mather organized a meeting to address the problem of suitability for many proposed national park sites with representatives from several state park agencies across the nation. The National Conference on Parks, held in Iowa, led to Mather advocating for states to establish parks at the sites deemed unsuitable for national recognition. As Landrum explains, Mather worried that too many parks would stretch the limited resources of the National Park Service while also promoting sites that were not nationally significant. Likewise, the emphasis on national parks in the western United States deprived Americans in the East and South of scenic areas to visit. The solution for this

24 An Act to Establish a National Park Service, and for other Purposes, U. S. Code 16 (1916), §§ 1 et seq.
problem, according to Mather, was the establishment of state parks at those sites instead of national parks.\textsuperscript{26}

The concern over the suitability of park sites on the national level proved to be the driving force behind the annual meetings of the National Conference on Parks, renamed in 1922 as the National Conference on State Parks (NCSP). Stephen Mather’s involvement with the Conference lasted until his death in 1930, during which he continued to steer the organization to promote the development of state parks. The influence of the NPS over the NCSP’s role continued after Mather’s death. Arno Cammerer, Associate Director of the NPS, expanded on that role in a speech to the NCSP in 1930:

I believe I am not far wrong in stating that one of the outstanding differences between the State parks and national parks is that the former are primarily scenic areas susceptible of detailed development for public use but chiefly of local interest, while the supreme scenic values of national parks have been founded upon their national and international reputation.\textsuperscript{27}

The influence of the NCSP on the development of state park systems nationwide is debatable. Landrum argues that the organization often wafted around the counterintuitive purposes of advocating for state parks while also attempting to protect the National Park Service from acquiring too many inadequate sites. Landrum admits that the Conference did much to promote the state park movement, but remains unsure of the impact made by the Conference on the expansion of state parks.\textsuperscript{28}

Landrum’s interpretation of the NCSP, however, misses the important consequences of intentionally delineating the role of state parks as subservient to that of national parks. For purely scenic natural parks, forests, and preserves such a role differs only in manpower and

\textsuperscript{26} Landrum, \textit{State Park Movement}, 78-86.
\textsuperscript{27} Arno B. Cammerer, “The Relationship between National and State Parks,” address to the National Conference on State Parks, Linville, N.C., January 17-20, 1930, in Board of Directors Papers, series 3, box 1, National Recreation and Park Association Library in Ashburn, Virginia.
\textsuperscript{28} Landrum, \textit{State Park Movement}, 122-123.
budget. The scenery of many proposed sites rivaled national parks, but failed because of their perceived lack of national significance or the inefficiency of their congressional representatives. Creating state parks offered a solution for those scenic and cultural sites that were important, but for whatever reason not deemed nationally significant. The NCSP outlined the role of state parks within a hierarchy of responsibility. The emphasis on “local interest,” greatly affected the environment around the development of state parks by stressing the local importance of the site as opposed to the national importance. Such a distinction had an enormous influence on the development of southern Civil War state historic sites.

New Deal conservation programs, like the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC), reinforced that hierarchical role in the 1930s, while also spurring the creation of park systems in several states through federal money and work projects. By the end of World War II, state park systems existed in forty-three states. According to reports by the Department of the Interior, over one thousand new state parks were established across the country between 1946 and 1960.29 Several states reorganized their park agencies to include more cultural and historic sites. State park battlefields benefited from that post-war reorganization, such as the placement of Olustee under the newly established Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials in 1949.30

Visitations to state parks also increased from over ninety-two million in 1946 to nearly two hundred sixty million by 1960.31 State parks received more attention and funding in the post-war economic boom because of their potential as tourist destinations for returning veterans and their new families, which in turn allowed these programs “to explore and pursue disparate

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31 Landrum, State Park Movement, 168.
philosophies, management objectives, and recreational offerings.”32 The establishment of the Interstate Highway System and the development of the suburbs also furthered the appeal of state parks as tourist destinations.

The localism of state park systems, well established by the late 1940s, allowed for the predominance of the Lost Cause interpretation at southern Civil War state historical sites. The narrative at these battlefields often reflected the local community’s perceptions of the history and included local traditions. The provincial institutionalization of state park agencies provided the underpinning for Civil War historic sites to continue propagating a pro-southern interpretation well into the latter half of the twentieth century. The park sites in Florida, Arkansas, and Tennessee, established in 1949, 1961, and 1975 respectively, highlight the difficulties of challenging traditional interpretations because of that institutional legacy of isolation produced during the first few decades of state park agencies.

These battlefields failed to be considered for national commemoration during the initial phase of battlefield preservation in the 1890s. Regionally, however, they retained significance for the local communities and within their states. Olustee, for example, is largely unknown outside of Florida but heralded throughout the state as “the largest battle fought in Florida” and commemorated yearly with “the largest annual battle reenactments in the southeastern United States.”33 Local and state memorialization did occur at Olustee, Jenkins Ferry, and Poison Springs with dedication of monuments under the guidance of the UDC in 1912, 1929, and 1930 respectively. Fort Pillow received no commemorative attention by heritage organizations until its establishment as a Tennessee state park in the 1970s. The creation of state parks at these

32 Landrum, State Park Movement, xiii.
battlefields occurred because of the post-World War II economic boom and the maturation of the state park movement as a process independent from the oversight of the national government.

Starting in the 1970s, these parks encountered several challenges to the traditional narrative through several shifting political, social, and economic factors. The success of the Civil Rights Movement influenced a new narrative for Civil War historic sites, while the elimination of segregation meant increased visitation by African Americans. The rise of public history as a career opportunity provided state parks with a new resource from which to develop programming. The establishment of Interpretative Services as a distinct division within many state park agencies also occurred during this decade, bringing along with it the expertise of professionally trained historians, exhibit designers, and park rangers. Finally, the changing role of the park ranger, from caretaker to that of educator, resulted in new programs and exhibits.34

The following three chapters provide case studies on four Civil War battlefield state parks. They include broad overviews and brief historiographical information on each battle, but will mostly cover the establishment of the battlefield as a state park and its development through the Twentieth Century. All were sites of racial violence during the war and all encountered difficulty as state parks in delivering that information to the public. Beginning in the 1970s and spanning the next forty years, state park agencies attempted to alter the traditional narrative at these battlefields and encountered stiff resistance to these changes. The success or failure of these attempts often rested upon a very small group of people, such as park rangers, interpretative division representatives, and the local populace. Their experiences, included in the following chapters, highlight the influence of small communities on many of our nation’s

historic sites and how their actions or inactions impact those sites for decades. It is also a great lesson for all public historians on the influence of memory at our nation’s historic sites.
CHAPTER II: OLUSTEE

In the fall of 2013, the Florida Governor’s Office received dozens of emails concerning a plan to build a monument to Union soldiers at the Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site. Many of the emails described the proposed granite obelisk as “a large black Darth Vader-esque shaft,” with one particular email labeling the proposed memorial “an abomination” that “resemble[d] a black phallus.” Other comments expressed disdain for a monument dedicated to “the invaders of our State.” A public hearing to decide the location of the monument was held on December 2, 2013 in Lake City Florida and presided over by representatives from the Department of Environmental Protection, which oversees the Florida Park Service. Nearly a hundred people attended, with an overwhelming majority voicing opposition against the creation of a monument at all. Subsequently, a state representative introduced a bill expressly forbidding the Park Service from altering any historic site without the permission of the state legislature.37

The swift response of local citizens, heritage organizations, and politicians shocked the supporters of the Union monument and the Florida Park Service. Such a reaction, however, offers insight into how white Floridians crafted a specific Civil War legacy at Olustee.

35 The phrase “Darth Vader-esque” appears in several emails. Michael Givens, Commander in Chief of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, used the phrase in his message to members on October 16, 2013. Many of the emails to the Governor’s office were copied from Mr. Givens’ message. His initial message can be found at http://sonsofconfederateveterans.blogspot.com/2013/10/act-now-to-help-olustee-battlefield.html (accessed on March 3, 2014); “Black phallus” reference is in Bill Knight to Governor Rick Scott, Oct. 16, 2013.
36 Lunelle Siegel to flstateparks@dep.state.fl.us, Sept. 13, 2013, ftp.dep.state.fl.us/pub/outgoing/Olustee%20Battlefiled%20Monument%20Comments/ (accessed on March 3, 2014).
Beginning in 1912, and continuing to the present day, Olustee Battlefield retains a central place within Florida Civil War memory. The original commemoration at the site, through the establishment of a monument in 1912 under the oversight of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), advocated a traditional interpretation of the battle that emphasized a white, southern, masculine defense of home over all other issues. Though tailored specifically toward the events at Olustee, the narrative aligned quite well with the larger southern explanation of the war that became known as the Lost Cause. Emphasis on the defense of the home and the roles of southern men as protectors of the South against northern aggression was a popular motif for the UDC during the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries. State control of the site, beginning in 1949, did little to alter that interpretation during the latter half of the twentieth century and never discarded the site’s original intention. Olustee maintains a place among the local and regional population as a place for commemoration and celebration of Confederate memory and identity, much as it did in 1912.

The commemoration at Olustee masks the complex historical realities of the battle. The presence of approximately 1600 African American Union soldiers at Olustee and acts of racial violence committed by Confederate soldiers following the battle provide support for a challenge to the traditional interpretation of the battle. The park minimized any references to black troops at Olustee until the 1970s, instead focusing on the Confederate soldier through static museum exhibits of artifacts. Still, the historical facts of the battle could not go unnoticed. The Union monument controversy in 2013 was the latest incident in a debate over the meaning of Olustee battlefield within Florida’s Civil War legacy. Advocates of Lost Cause narrative have successfully silenced most counter interpretations from complicating the original purpose of the site.
Olustee Battlefield remains a public space where Confederate culture and heritage can be commemorated and even celebrated. The state’s commemoration of the battle, while problematic, has evolved since the dedication of the Olustee Monument in 1912. Beginning in the 1970s, the state began including more references to the black regiments present at Olustee. Further development occurred in 1996 when the Florida Park Service, in cooperation with the Olustee Battlefield Citizens Support Organization and Lake City Community College, developed an orientation film that further highlighted the efforts of African American soldiers and referenced the atrocities committed by Confederates at the end of the battle. Local and regional memory of the battle does not reflect these advancements in scholarship and has countered them through other means. Building upon earlier commemorations in the Twentieth Century, the Olustee battle is memorialized annually with a reenactment weekend in February. Occurring since 1977, this event provides an outlet for Lost Cause apologists and reasserts the original purpose of the site on behalf of pro-Confederate white southerners. During the reenactment weekend, emphasis is placed upon the Confederate side of the battle, with most reenactors portraying Confederates and providing education on Confederate history. Confederate heritage organizations, such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans are heavily represented. The League of the South, a political organization still advocating secession from the United States, is also present during the reenactment weekend.

Such a disparity between historical events and commemorative representation is indicative of larger trends within Florida’s Civil War memory and the resilience of the Lost Cause among some white southerners. The battlefield park, initiated by the UDC in 1912 and subsequently controlled by that organization for nearly forty years, heavily influenced the state’s
role in perpetuating a pro-southern interpretation at Olustee. That legacy still exists at Olustee Battlefield and culminates every year at the annual reenactment weekend.

The battle reenactment is held every February, usually on the weekend closest to the February 20th anniversary of the battle. Both Union and Confederate reenactors establish camps and provide demonstrations for the public on Friday and Saturday. On Sunday, the battle is recreated on a portion of the historic battlefield in front of crowds that often number in the thousands. The battle reenactment follows the events of the actual battle, albeit in a smaller arena and with fewer men. Very few black reenactors participate and the reenactment ends with the Union army being driven off the field. This is in spite of the historical record of the battle, which involved large numbers of black troops and the subsequent killing of unarmed soldiers after the battle. The lack of both does not distinguish the Olustee event from the many others that occur throughout the South each year.

The prominence of Neo-Confederate organizations throughout the event and the size of the reenactment illustrate the paramount role of Olustee within the post-Civil Rights memory of the Civil War for many white Floridians. The annual battle reenactment weekend is a safe space for white southerners to express regional pride and grants tacit support to a nascent Neo-Confederate movement. The reason for such an event is derived from a decades-long focus at Olustee to “emphasize the Lost Cause interpretation of the Old South and the Civil War” and based upon the consequences of the Union defeat.38 The initial narrative proclaimed during the UDC commemoration of Olustee in 1912, stressing the defense of Florida from the invading Union army, remains the foundation of commemoration at Olustee to the present.

The battle was fought on February 20, 1864, in an open pine forest about two miles from the small hamlet of Olustee. Five thousand Confederates halted an equal force of Union troops from advancing into Lake City, an important supply point on the Florida, Atlantic, and Gulf Railroad. The battle holds the distinction of being the largest Civil War battle fought in Florida, with over ten thousand combatants participating. The outcome of the battle forced the Union to retreat back to Jacksonville. Union troops never threatened the Florida interior for the remainder of the war, which later became a point of pride for many Floridians during the post-war period.39

Black soldiers were conspicuous during the battle. Nearly thirty percent of the Union force were African American and organized in three regiments: the Eighth United States Colored Troops, the First North Carolina (Colored), and the famous Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts (Colored). Nearly 1600 black troops participated in the battle, which made Olustee the largest engagement involving United States Colored Troops (USCT) up to that point during the war.40 The Eighth USCT held the left line of the Union advance during much of the battle, suffering 310 casualties. Both the First North Carolina and Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts performed a rearguard action, allowing the rest of the Union force to retreat back to Jacksonville.41

Despite only having a little over ten thousand combatants, Olustee proved to be a truly bloody battle. Union casualties numbered 1,861 with the Confederates suffering 946 casualties. Though small in comparison to other battles during the war’s third year, the casualties represent nearly twenty-seven percent of the combatants. Union casualties are thirty-five percent of those engaged, which makes Olustee proportionally the third bloodiest battle for the Union during the

39 NHS application form, Master Site File-Olustee, Florida Park Service Archives.
entire war. The three USCT units suffered 626 casualties, which was one-third of the Union losses.\textsuperscript{42}

The Confederate victory was followed by looting and killing on the battlefield. Reports of mistreatment toward black Union soldiers were reported in Confederate newspapers and in private letters. Historian David J. Coles argues that “between 25 and 50 black troops may have been killed after the battle’s close.”\textsuperscript{43} A post war memoir by William Penniman, a Confederate private in the 4\textsuperscript{th} Georgia Cavalry, provided one eyewitness account to the killing. Shortly after the battle he heard gunfire “going on in every direction” and “almost frequent enough to resemble the bark of skirmishers.” Finding an officer, Penniman asked about the firing and received the response: “Shooting niggers, Sir.”\textsuperscript{44} Penniman continues to describe his exchange with the officer after he expressed remorse for the killing:

That’s so Sir, but one young fellow over yonder told me the niggers killed his brother after being wounded, at Fort Pillow, and he was twenty three years old, that he had already killed nineteen and needed only four more to make the matter even, so I told him to go ahead and finish the job.\textsuperscript{45}

The next day Penniman elaborated on the results of the previous night’s shootings by remarking that the wounded he witnessed “moving around from place to place” were “now without a motion, … dead.” “If a negro had a shot in the shin,” Penniman states, “another was sure to be in the head.


\textsuperscript{43} Coles, “Confederate Mistreatment,” p. 77.

\textsuperscript{44} William Penniman was a private in the Fourth Georgia Cavalry, but received the honorary title of Captain due to his post-war involvement with veteran organizations. The response he recounted of in his \textit{Reminiscence} included the use of a “sir,” which may be explained as either poor memory or the fact that he was possibly on a horse when addressing the young officer in the road. \textit{William Penniman Reminiscences}, William Penniman Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 60.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Penniman Reminiscences}, 60-61.
Penniman goes on to describe the experiences of the few black soldiers taken prisoner. One of them was interrogated “as to how it happened that he had come back to fight his old master” and after hearing the response “his interragater(sic) drew back his musket, and gave him a blow that killed him instantly.” Penniman even mentions the possible mutilation of wounded black soldiers by the surgeons, stating that “their legs fairly flew off, but whether they were at all seriously wounded I have always had my doubt.”

Penniman’s account, penned in 1901, is one of the most condemning pieces of evidence of Confederate brutality against black Union soldiers at Olustee, but it is not completely trustworthy. It contains some questionable evidence, such as the officer’s defense of the killing being the murder of a brother at Fort Pillow. The battle of Fort Pillow occurred on April 12, 1864, almost two full months after the battle of Olustee. Penniman’s inclusion of the remark in his Reminiscences could be pointed to as a mistake in chronology made by an elderly veteran. It is, however, quite telling that he included Fort Pillow in his narrative on the aftermath of Olustee. The massacre of black soldiers by Confederate forces under the command of Nathan Bedford Forrest was investigated by Congress during the war and remained a controversial subject during the post-war period and into the Twentieth Century. Penniman’s inclusion of it in his Olustee memoirs, though historically inaccurate, may nevertheless indicate a comparative description of what he heard during the night after the battle of Olustee and witnessed the following morning. Fort Pillow’s notoriety was Penniman’s gauge of what he saw at Olustee.

Perhaps Penniman’s memory was questionable in 1901, but other contemporary accounts also point toward Confederate brutality at Olustee. A letter printed in the Atlantic Daily Intelligencer that reported many southerners “walked over many a wooly head as we drove them

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46 Penniman Reminiscences, 61.
47 Penniman Reminiscences, 61.
Further harm followed those soldiers unfortunate to be captured. Only about twenty-five black soldiers of the 158 listed as missing were accounted for at the end of the war. That represents only sixteen percent. According to Coles, the rest “had either been killed during the battle itself or by Confederates soon afterward.”\(^\text{49}\) It is also possible that some died in route to or at prisoner of war camps. At Andersonville it was reported by an eyewitness that wounded black soldiers “were turned into the Stockade without having their hurts attended to.”\(^\text{50}\) Black prisoners received little to no medical treatment, were unfairly beaten by guards, and often received poorer rations than their white counterparts while imprisoned in southern prison camps.\(^\text{51}\) Confederate policy toward captured black soldiers was ambivalent and underscored by racism. Those soldiers that escaped outright murder could face a return to slavery, beatings, little to no medical treatment, or placement in a prisoner of war camp with no hope for exchange. Looming over any of these outcomes was the perception that an armed black man was a dire threat to southern society and the institution of slavery.

There was no public outcry at the time over these incidents, partly because of the lack of any factual knowledge about the battle at the time and the physical distance of the battle from journalists. No journalist accompanied the Union army on the Olustee campaign. The Confederates remained in command of the field following Olustee and Union soldiers would not return to the area until after the war. The Union abandoned the Florida interior after Olustee, except for small raids, for the rest of the war. Any information reported by northern newspapers, therefore, relied upon secondary information. The remote location of the battle and a


\(^{49}\) Coles, “Confederate Mistreatment,” 80.


\(^{51}\) Coles, “Confederate Mistreatment,” 79.
Confederate victory resulted in contradictory reports by Federal officers and newspapers. Even the size of the Confederate army was highly debated. The Union commander, Brigadier General Truman Seymour, wrote in his initial report that the Confederates were a “largely superior force” despite being roughly equal to his own army.\(^{52}\) This exaggeration showed up in the newspapers, such as the *New York Herald* where the Confederate army was reported to number fifteen thousand.\(^{53}\) Seymour’s commanding officer, Major General Quincy Adams Gillmore, only corrected that mistake in a post war report.\(^{54}\)

Lacking the notoriety of other battles, such as Fort Pillow, and its small size meant that Olustee never received much national attention following the war. Such was not the case in Florida. Florida’s role within the Confederacy was a small one, albeit not so small as to prevent white Floridians from wanting to emphasize their state’s role during the conflict. As the largest battle in the state, and a Confederate victory to boot, Olustee emerged as focal point of the state’s UDC organization during the 1890s.

The importance of the Florida Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy toward the creation of the Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park cannot be understated. The state division, created in 1896, pledged a resolution to fund the building of a monument at Olustee during their second convention in January, 1897. The Florida UDC began immediately lobbying the state legislature to commemorate the “site of the most important battle of the War of 1861-1865 fought on Florida soil.”\(^{55}\) The Florida State Legislature supported the effort on June 2, 1899 by appropriating $2500 toward a monument and creating a commission to oversee

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\(^{54}\) *Official Records*, ser. 1, 35: 291.

the project. The legislation decreed that the commission erect “a monument to the Federal and
Confederate officers and soldiers who participated in said battle” and were “authorized to receive
subscriptions from the public…to aid in the erection of said monument.”

The inclusion of Federal forces in the legislation did not go unnoticed by the UDC or
other organizations. The Florida Division of the UDC passed a resolution declining to endorse
the passed legislation during its annual convention in January, 1900. The UDC refused “to have
anything to do with the Union soldiers’ graves at Olustee, because the soldiers of the Union army
buried there were negroes.” Furthermore, they stated that “to decorate the graves of negroes
along with the graves of the Confederate dead seems impossible for the society.” A similar
resolution appeared from the E.A. Perry Camp of Confederate Veterans in Lake City, Florida.
Viewing the bill as “doing as much honor to an army of negroes who were for the purpose of
despoiling our homes as to our own fathers, husbands, and brothers, who bravely defended
them,” caused the camp to “enter our emphatic protest against said law” at their annual
meeting. The adamant protests of both the UDC and other heritage organizations led to an
amendment to the legislation in 1901 when the next session of the Florida legislature met. The
amended legislation removed any mention of Federal officers and soldiers. Instead, the Olustee
monument would honor only Confederate soldiers.

The debate over the purpose of the Olustee monument provides an insight about the rapid
creation of monuments to the Confederacy throughout the South at the beginning of the
Twentieth Century. Within the same newspaper reporting the backlash toward the state’s

56 Attorney General for the State of Florida, Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida at its
Seventh Regular Session (Florida: The Tallahasseean Book and Job Print, 1899), 214.
57 “Refuse to Indorse Action,” Bradford County Telegraph, February 16, 1900, 1; “Olustee in the Campaign,”
Bradford County Telegraph, February 16, 1900, 4.
58 “Old Vets Protest,” Bradford County Telegraph, January 5, 1900, 4.
59 Attorney General for the State of Florida, Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida at its
Eighth Regular Session (Florida: The Tallahasseean Book and Job Print, 1901), 207-208.
decision is an article about comments made on the floor of the U.S. Senate concerning “the race question in the south.” Senator Jeter Pritchard of North Carolina spoke against a bill to alter the enfranchisement requirements in North Carolina, stating that it “would disfranchise a large class of voters, both white and black.” During the debate, Senator Ben Tillman of South Carolina interrupted Pritchard several times to denounce the “negro domination” of southern governments.60

The placement of Confederate monuments occurred within an atmosphere of hardening racial lines throughout the South, during which the first Jim Crow laws appeared. The political power enjoyed by African Americans after the Civil War did not immediately disappear with the formal close of Reconstruction in 1877. Political coalitions between white and black southerners could still exist up until 1900 on the city and state levels. The possibility for political power waned, however, during the late Nineteenth Century. The Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court ruling in 1896 and the rewriting of several southern state constitutions led to a near complete disenfranchisement for southern African Americans.

The loss of black voting rights and the rise of Confederate memorialization were directly connected. These commemorations denoted a symbolic victory for the southern way of life, despite the literal defeat suffered by the Confederacy in 1865. White southerners could now commemorate their own version of the Civil War, secure in the knowledge that even if they lost the war, their view of how a bi-racial society should work was politically assured. The UDC’s mission to commemorate their Confederate fathers, husbands, and brothers reaffirmed this racial

60 The Bradford County Telegraph reproduced one exchange between Pritchard and Tillman concerning the appointment of black postal workers, no doubt to the delight of its readers. “Mr. Tillman, of South Carolina, interrupted to say that little else was to be expected when the administration continually thrust negro postmasters on the people of the south. ‘There you have it,’ retorted Mr. Pritchard. ‘If I should read the ten commandments to the senator he would cry, negro back at me.’ ‘We say nigger in the south, not negro,’ replied Mr. Tillman. ‘Let us stick to the facts.’” “Pritchard Speaks,” Bradford County Telegraph, January 26, 1900, 1.
hierarchy through the monuments placed across the South in public spaces such as courthouse squares, university campuses, and battlefields. Law and social tradition ordered the present lives and conduct of southern black folk, while these monuments presented a whitewashed narrative of the past that dismissed any doubt about the righteousness of the southern cause.

Nearly ten years after the controversy over the legislation, the state bought land on the battlefield for the monument. Austin B. Fletcher sold two acres of land to the State on August 6, 1909 for one dollar. One month later, John and Eliza Brown sold one acre to the State for one dollar. Together, these three acres would later constitute the Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site.61 Though not formally placed under a state park agency until 1949, the Florida Park Service traces its origin back to these two land sales in 1909.62

The monument was completed in 1912 and dedicated on October 23. The dedication was the highlight of a three day United Confederate Veteran State Session. Special trains took people from nearby Lake City to the battlefield, with nearly 1500 people witnessing the dedication. Former Confederate Major General Evander M. Law, Governor Albert W. Gilchrist, and U.S. Senator Duncan U. Fletcher spoke at the dedication. Senator Fletcher served on the monument commission and gave the dedication speech.63

Senator Fletcher, according to the Lake City Reporter, “drew a beautiful word picture of the Olustee battle...lauding the Confederate soldiers for their courage and bravery.” Fletcher openly admitted that “the existence of slavery in the South was a more or less prolific source of trouble and feeling which tended to make the war inevitable,” while reminding the crowd that it was Bostonian Peter Fanneuil who “sent out the last ship from this country for a cargo of slaves.”

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62 Historical Research Committee, The Battle of Olustee, 7.
63 “Many Attend U.C.V. Session,” Lake City Reporter, October 25, 1912, 1.
Though arguing that slavery’s “disappearance was a fitting end to the horrible traffic,” Fletcher also implicated the entire nation in the sin of slavery by mentioning that slavery was legal in twelve of the original thirteen states when the Constitution was ratified.64

Fletcher’s direct acknowledgement of slavery as a cause of the war may seem strange to readers familiar with present day arguments from Lost Cause apologists. Such admissions were rather quite common during the early twentieth century, because of the complicated myth crafted by white southerners. Defeat was an accepted fact, but white southerners learned to cope with that defeat by redrawning the parameters of the outcome. Slavery, recognized by the Civil War generation as the catalyst of the war, was perceived as a “fateful misadventure” that limited the South’s economic advancement alongside the rest of the nation.65 The South could take solace in defeat because it was no longer shackled to slavery and no longer forced to defend the institution. Such a realization was not accompanied by a reevaluation toward the racial traits of the formerly enslaved. Instead, the acceptance of slavery as the cause of the war and the collective sin of the nation allowed for further white reconciliation between North and South, while the failed experiment of Reconstruction only strengthened the southern and northern views of black inferiority.

Fletcher’s openness about slavery, therefore, should only be understood within that larger framework of the Lost Cause interpretation of the war. Fletcher continued by describing slavery in the language of property rights, adding that the South fought “not to perpetuate slavery, but in defense of the principles of self government and of the right of the states to regulate their own

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64 Massachusetts was the only state that abolished slavery before 1789. “Many Attend U.C.V. Session,” Lake City Reporter, October 25, 1912, 1.
Fletcher presents the central tenet of the Lost Cause. Southerners went to war to defend their property and political rights, which included the institution of slavery, from a federal government overstepping its constitutional boundary. Those rights, outlined in the Constitution, were articulated by post war southerners as the paramount cause of the war. The interpretation sidesteps the central issue of the slavery, replacing it with a constitutional debate. Fletcher supported the view of a war about constitutionality, rather than slavery, by stating that “one-half of the men who constituted the armies of the Confederacy were not the owners of slaves, and many of them were personally opposed to the institution of slavery.”

Fletcher mentioned the second tenet of the Lost Cause after the defense of constitutional property rights by adding that southerners also fought “to repel invasion of their homes and firesides.” Florida seceded before the firing on Fort Sumter, but suffered constant occupation along its coastline throughout the war. The battle of Olustee itself was the culmination of a Union advancement into central Florida. Despite the ever present Union Navy and Army along the coastline, Floridians took great pride during the post-war in pointing to the inability of Federal forces to occupy the interior of the state. That view dominates the interpretation at Olustee to this day.

Fletcher concluded by praising the United Daughters of the Confederacy for their efforts in creating the granite monument by stating:

In this granite tower which proclaims the honor of the Confederate soldiers is likewise the evidence of your self sacrifice and your holy zeal. As it stands sentinel over the field where the Confederate soldier won admission to the temple of fame, it will tell of the great love which made it possible, and it will recall to coming generations the heroism of that noble band of saintly women who witnessed the great war and suffered its horrors and who have passed or are rapidly passing to endless joy and peace.

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The UDC stands above most as the ones responsible for advocating the Lost Cause at Olustee, as well as throughout the South. Following in the footsteps of the Ladies Memorial Associations, the UDC was founded in 1894 as a “benevolent, historical, educational, and social organization that vindicated Confederate veterans.” During the 1890s, the United Daughters of the Confederacy provided battlefields and southern towns with monuments dedicated to the Lost Cause. Emphasizing the bravery and devotion of southern soldiers in defense of their homes, these monuments spread quickly across the South over the next twenty years.

The presence of the UDC was ubiquitous on that October day. The UDC advocated and supported an interpretation that validated the veterans present, while also undertaking the education of future southerners. Maids and Matrons of Honor were present on the stage for the unveiling. The inclusion of the ladies, a common sight at the unveiling of Confederate monuments, highlighted the important role of women in maintaining the traditions and memory of their Confederate forebears.

The monument was turned over to the State of Florida in 1912, but maintained by the UDC through special contract with the state government. A local UDC chapter, the Varina Davis Chapter #1980 in Macelenny, coordinated events at the site. The custodian of the site was Mrs. J. N. Whitner, whose husband had been an artilleryman during the war and a veteran of the battle. She introduced the motion to start a fund for an Olustee monument in 1897 and steered the UDC’s involvement as head of the Olustee Monument Committee until her death sometime in the 1920s. Whitner reported annually to the Florida Division during their annual

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71 Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 60-61.
72 R.A. Green to President, Tallahassee Chapter UDC, May 23, 1930, Olustee Memorial-Correspondence, Florida Division, “UDC Scrapbook,” Florida State Archives.
convention and lobbied the legislature for more funds. By 1918, Whitner had overseen the building of a stone wall and iron gate at the entrance of the park. A flagpole was also installed near the monument.73

In 1921, Whitner wrote of the need for a caretakers’ lodge at the site and began pressuring the legislature for more money.74 The caretaker’s lodge was not built until 1926, by which time Whitner had passed away. The UDC also received annual appropriations from the state legislature, often amounting from $400 to $1000 a year. The money supported the caretaker and provided for upkeep of the monument.75 Local UDC chapters held picnics at the site in late April in observance of Confederate Memorial Day.76 Reports also indicated an annual visitation of nearly 200 visitors during the 1920s.77

Two cannons and an additional monument were added by the UDC in the 1930s.78 Both cannons were placed in front of the monument, facing towards the south. The new monument was dedicated to a Confederate commander at Olustee, Brig. General Alfred Colquitt. Colquitt’s monument was erected by the Alfred Holt Colquitt Chapter of the Georgia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy on April 20, 1936. Colquitt is honored with the title “Hero of Olustee” on the marker and credited with a victory that “prevented a Sherman-like invasion of

73 Lancaster, *Early Years of the Florida Division UDC*, 62.
76 Austin Fletcher to ________, April 5, 1922, Olustee Memorial-Correspondence, Florida Division, “UDC Scrapbook”, Florida State Archives.
77 Ruth H. Cole, *The Battle of Olustee: A Description of Florida’s Major Battle in the War Between the States, which took place near Lake City, February 20, 1864*, (Florida Division, UDC, Dec. 1929), 14-15.
78 R.A. Green to President, Tallahassee Chapter UDC, May 23, 1930, Olustee Memorial-Correspondence, Florida Division, “UDC Scrapbook,” Florida State Archives.
Georgia from the South.” This marker is located in front of the 1912 monument and faces east. Annie Arkwright, a great-granddaughter of General Colquitt, unveiled the marker at a ceremony on May 1, 1936. Delegates of the Florida and Georgia UDC were present for the ceremony, as were representatives of the Georgia and Florida state governments.

On March 6, 1951, the Florida Division of the UDC placed a second monument in honor of Brigadier General Joseph Finegan. Representatives of the State Legislature and the State Parks Commission received the marker as a gift from the UDC. The simple stone marker, placed in front of the 1912 monument and facing west, honored the highest ranking Confederate officer from Florida.

80 “UDC Marker for Colquitt is Unveiled,” The Florida Times-Union, May 2, 1936.
Figure 2. Colquitt Monument. Author’s collection.

All three monuments represent the growing influence of the Lost Cause during the first half of the Twentieth Century, specifically on Olustee’s landscape. The UDC, through a variety of methods, cultivated a pro-Confederate interpretation through which white southerners interpreted the war. The primary purpose of this interpretation, as articulated by the UDC, “transmitted Confederate ideals to white southern children.” Education of future generations became a primary goal of memorialization during the 1890s. The monuments at Olustee conveyed the pro-Confederate interpretation of the battle, and consequently the war, as a defense of home and liberty. That sentiment is further expressed in marble on the monument itself:

To the men who fought and triumphed here in defense of their homes and firesides this monument is erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy aided by the State of Florida in commemoration of their devotion to the cause of liberty and state sovereignty.

Sen. Fletcher echoed that interpretation and stressed the importance of the 1912 monument by stating: “We want it to be constantly told for all time, to all people by this sentinel, on duty day and night, in fair weather and in storm, never sleeping, never shirking.” The erection of a Confederate monument on a Civil War battlefield was not uncommon. As the only monument on a battlefield, however, the Olustee monument represented an opportunity for the Florida UDC to control the narrative from the beginning. Unlike other battlefield parks in 1912, such as Gettysburg or Shiloh, the Olustee battlefield park could focus entirely upon the Confederate side of the war and provide a place for the proper education of white southern children about their heritage. The absence of any Union monuments or cemeteries allowed the UDC to develop a Confederate shrine at Olustee with the full backing of the state government for almost forty years.

81 Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 2.
82 Photograph in author’s collection.
83 “Many Attend U.C.V. Session,” *Lake City Reporter*, October 25, 1912, 2.
A great example of the UDC’s interpretation of the war exists in the thesis chiseled on General Colquitt’s marker. The supposition that Colquitt’s victory at Olustee “prevented a Sherman-like invasion of Georgia from the South” is a specious argument and bad history. Union reports made by Generals Seymour and Gillmore make no mention of advancing into Georgia. Gillmore and Seymour discussed a variety of options in early February, such as advancing as far as Lake City, the Suwannee River, or even Tallahassee. The Union forces in Florida lacked the ability to conduct an expedition into Georgia, mostly because of the difficult terrain and lack of a secure railroad line from which to be resupplied. It is also worth noting that in February 1864, Major General William T. Sherman was serving under Major General Ulysses S. Grant, who commanded the Military Division of Mississippi and had not yet assumed command of that theater or launched any invasions into Georgia. Sherman was, in fact, leading the Army of the Tennessee on the Meridian Expedition in February of 1864 at the time of the Olustee battle.

The inclusion of that statement on Colquitt’s marker resulted from a conflation of Civil War memory and history. The Colquitt Chapter is located in Atlanta, Georgia. Their record books contain many programs about the harsh experience of civilians during the Battle of Atlanta and Sherman’s subsequent March to the Sea. By the 1930s, Sherman’s March held a very menacing place within the Lost Cause hagiography and was the paramount example for the depredations suffered by white southerners during and after the war.

The commemoration at Olustee is distinctly Confederate, from its origins and throughout the first half of the Twentieth Century. The presence of the monuments and the involvement of

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85 Eicher, The Longest Night, 635-636.
the UDC insured that the Olustee Battlefield remained a place of significance within the
Confederate memory of white Floridians. The site was maintained by the UDC for nearly thirty
eight years, until transferred to the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Monuments in 1949.87
No interpretative markers, other than the three monuments, provided any further information
about the battle. A specific pro-southern understanding of the battle was inherited by the State of
Florida in 1949 and evident on the landscape of Olustee. Any challenges to that interpretation
would prove to be an uphill battle.

The New Deal did more to create the Florida Park Service than perhaps any other person
or event. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), one of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s
favorite programs to get unemployed men back to work, provided states with money to
undertake conservation projects. In order to get the federal money, however, Florida needed to
make public land available for the establishment of camps. Since the state had no state forests or
state parks, legislation was quickly passed in 1933 to create a Board of Forestry. The Board of
Forestry immediately made plans to investigate for “reforestation projects, state forests and state
parks.”88 In 1935, the state legislature expanded on the 1933 legislation with seven laws
addressing forestry and parks. One of these laws authorized the creation of the Florida Park
Service, under the management of the Board of Forestry. An equal sum of $25,000 per year for
both state parks and state forests provided the Board of Forestry with the means in which to
expand. Furthermore, the legislature mandated that the Board of Forestry purchase more land so
that Florida may “fully qualify for the aid and assistance offered by presidential executive orders

88 Ney C. Landrum, ed., *Histories of the Southeastern State Park Systems* (Tallahassee: Association of Southeastern
State Park Directors, 1992), 27.
and federal legislation providing for the establishment and operation of CCC camps.” Many of the subsequent state parks built in the 1930s and 1940s were under the guidance of the CCC. Following the disbanding of the CCC in 1942 and the U.S. entry in World War II, park development and expansion halted.

Recreational sites were first acquired under legislation in 1935, which placed state park system under the jurisdiction of the Board of Forestry. The law established state recreation areas and state monuments, of which Olustee was placed in the latter category. State monuments, however, were on state land and supported by the legislature, but “direct supervision and maintenance . . . rested either with special committees appointed by the Governor or with patriotic organizations.” Through this legislation the UDC continued to oversee the Olustee battlefield until after World War II.

The 1935 legislation contained no language pertaining to the purpose or objective of the Florida Park Service. This changed in 1949 with the introduction of a concurrent resolution in the State Legislature by State Senator Leroy Collins. The Collins Bill created the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials and contained specific language outlining the purpose of a state park agency. One of these objectives explicitly noted that the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials “provide for perpetual preservation of historic sites and memorials of statewide significance and interpretation of their history to the people.” The Collins Bill separated the Florida Park Service from the State Forestry office, and set the precedent on which the

91 Hager, Preliminary Plan, 22.
current Florida Park Service still operates. Under the 1949 legislation, the state formally took charge of the Olustee Battlefield from the UDC. 92

Olustee Monument was not a very impressive park in 1949. The site consisted of only three acres, the 1912 battle monument, the 1936 Colquitt monument, and two cannons. The small residence built by the UDC during the 1920s was reported to be very dilapidated by the 1950s. No other permanent markers were placed on the battlefield or near the monuments. State control offered the historic site new means through which to commemorate the state’s largest Civil War battle. That potential, however, did not result in a change of interpretation about the battle.93

The state reorganized the site in the 1950s, altering the Olustee Memorial along the same lines as other Civil War battlefields. Under the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, Olustee Battlefield began to resemble other battlefields with the state creating plans for trails, interpretative markers, interpretational literature, and a museum. Moving beyond the three acres of state land, the site also sought to incorporate more of the historical battlefield for interpretational purposes. Central to the site, however, remained the commemorative area around the 1912 monument.

The transition from UDC oversight to a full-fledged state park in 1949 led to renewed discussions between state officials and the Federal government concerning the rest of the battlefield. The state-owned three acres encompassed only a small part of the historic battlefield, with the rest owned by the Osceola National Forest, which is operated by the U.S. Forest Service. The National Forest covers nearly 200,000 acres of northeastern Florida. President

Hoover designated the area on July 10, 1931, naming it after the Seminole warrior, Osceola. During the 1930s and 1940s, reforestation became the main goal of the Osceola National Forest because of previous heavy logging. Several of the state’s plans for Olustee, such as the completion of an interpretational trail, would require the permission of the U.S. Forest Service. Since the 1950s, both the state park service and the U.S. Forest Service have worked closely together. The function of interpretation, however, has remained firmly within the control of the state park service. Osceola National Forest and Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site divided the responsibilities concerning the historic battlefield site under a Special Use Permit in 1978. It established the National Forest responsibility toward the stewardship of the land, while the state’s responsibilities were historical interpretation and education. The permit covered 267 acres and greatly enlarged the interpretational area under control of the Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park.94

In 1952, the National Forest allowed a trail to be cut through the original battlefield. Starting on the northwest corner of the state site, the trail looped along the federal lines, turning left, and then returned through the Confederate lines to the state site. Visitors crossed through a turnstile, located in the fence that separated state property from the National Forest. Along the trail were placed small interpretative signs that noted the location of specific regiments. Only three of the signs indicated Union regiments, specifically the Forty-Seventh, Forty-Eighth, and One Hundred-Fifteenth NY. None of the three black regiments were included on any sign. The trail remains in use to the present day. After 1978, the fence and turnstile were removed.95

95 Olustee Pamphlet (1952 and 1958), “Permanent Park Files-Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site,” Florida Park Service Archives; In preparation for the United States Bicentennial in 1975, the number of signs on the battlefield
Figure 4. Olustee Brochure Map, 1958. “Permanent Park Files-Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site,” Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.

Figure 5. Acreage covered under the Special Use Permit, 1978. “Use Permit-Olustee Battlefield,” Jim Stevenson Collection, Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.

were reduced from twenty-nine to twenty, Jim Stevenson to Ellison Hardee, August 26, 1975, “General-Olustee Battlefield file,” Jim Stevenson Collection, Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.
The inclusion of Olustee Battlefield under the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials also provided the site with better opportunities for advertisement. The site was highlighted in the *Florida Highways* May 1950 issue. Dorothy Dodd, an archivist at the Florida State Library, wrote an article, “Olustee Battlefield Memorial” that provided a short history of the battle. Dodd’s interpretation focused primarily on the military events at Olustee and offered a succinct explanation of the battle. Very little attention was paid to the USCT units at Olustee. Dodd described a federal force of 5500 soldiers, in which “about one-third were Negro troops, the white soldiers being mainly from New York, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.”

Dodd’s article highlighted a basic historical relevance of Olustee for the benefit of the rising number of tourists visiting Florida after World War II. *Florida Highways* magazine received state funding in an effort to encourage tourism in Florida. Other publications of the piece were sought after as well, such as by local newspapers and in a booklet form by the State Department of Agriculture. Copies of the article were available for purchase at the site for several years.

A new academic account of the battle also appeared in 1950. Dr. Mark F. Boyd, working with the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, contributed the central interpretation of Olustee in an article for the *Florida Historical Quarterly’s*. Dr. Boyd, a physician who specialized in tropical medicine, also wrote extensively on Florida history. He served as president of the Florida Historical Association and consulted as a historian with the Florida Park Service.

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Boyd’s article, “The Federal Campaign of 1864 in East Florida,” remains one of the most accessible overviews of the campaign and battle of Olustee to the present. Boyd used primary sources, such as the battle reports of Generals Seymour, Finegan, and Colquitt. Boyd also heavily relied upon reminiscences of Confederate and Union soldiers published by *The Century Magazine* during the 1880s and later published in the collection, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. Two notable pro-southern interpretation works also consulted were J. J. Dickison’s *Military History of the Florida*, published in 1899 as part of the *Confederate Military History* collection, and William Watson Davis’ *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (1913). Davis was a student of William Dunning at Columbia University and his work remained influential in Florida until the 1960s. Boyd wrote a straightforward military interpretation of the 1864 Florida campaign and its culmination at Olustee. Boyd started with the initial planning of the campaign in December 1863 and followed it through to the conclusion of the campaign in early March 1864. His work remains a succinct, yet informative, overview of the campaign and battle.98

Such an overview, however, did little to elaborate on the three USCT regiments’ experiences during the campaign. Boyd’s article followed the current approach toward military history, with an emphasis on the decisions of generals and other officers. A short section, entitled “Appraisal,” concluded the article by assessing both commanders’ decisions during the battle and commenting on their mistakes. The motivations of soldiers or the social/cultural systems which triggered the response of Confederate soldiers toward black Union troops did not appear in many Civil War monographs in 1950, therefore its lack of appearance in Boyd’s article is not surprising.

Boyd’s article provided a top-down interpretation of the military campaign as a guide for the newly created Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park. His close association with the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, as historian to the park service, resulted in the article’s reprinting by the Park Service in 1955. Several drafts were sent to the Board, along with a memo written by Dr. Boyd concerning the construction of historical markers on the battlefield and along the campaign route from Jacksonville to Lake City. The straightforward nature of the article made an excellent field guide for visitors to the park. Copies were sold at the museum for twenty cents. A reprint of the article, along with later articles on Olustee, is currently sold by the Columbia County Historical Museum.

Smaller handouts, produced by the Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, were available at the site starting in the early 1950s. These handouts began as a simple paper leaflet, usually printed on both sides. One side depicted a map of the immediate battlefield, including the monument, museum, and trails. Also depicted on the map were the general locations of several Confederate and Union regiments (See figure 1). The reverse side of the leaflet provided a brief description of the campaign, battle, and park. Various versions of the leaflet appear in the State Park Archives, denoting constant revisions of the leaflet during the 1960s and 1970s. The chief similarity between the leaflets, from the 1950s until well into the late 1970s, is the absence of any mention of USCT units.

USCT units remain unmentioned on pamphlets until 1976. A new pamphlet depicts the general battle lines, including a larger list of the engaged regiments and their positions. The

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100 Typed Draft of Boyd Memo, “Permanent Park Files-Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site,” Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.
three African American regiments are depicted, but contain no notation to identify them as black regiments. They are listed as the First North Carolina, Seventh Massachusetts, and Eighth U.S. All of these units are mislabeled in some way on the map. The Eighth U.S. should be designated the Eighth USCT and the First North Carolina should be listed as the First North Carolina Colored Volunteers. The designation of the Seventh Massachusetts is the most grievous mistake on the map. It appears to be a mashing of the Seventh New Hampshire, a white regiment, and the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, a black regiment. The actual Seventh Massachusetts Infantry Regiment was stationed at Brandy Station, Virginia in February, 1864. The unit was part of the Fourth Brigade, Second Division, Sixth Army Corps of the Army of the Potomac. The unit never served in the Florida theatre.\footnote{102} The error mislabeled the most famous African American regiment of the war. The mislabeled Seventh Massachusetts remained on the brochure until it was fixed in late 1977.\footnote{103} Subsequent brochures listed the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts, while the mislabeled Eighth U.S. remained on maps well into the 1990s.\footnote{104}


\footnote{103} Bill Thurston to Jim Stevenson, March 29, 1977, “General-Olustee Battlefield,” Jim Stevenson Collection, Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.

Figure 6. Mislabeled map in Olustee Battlefield pamphlet, 1976. “General-Olustee Battlefield,” Jim Stevenson Collection, Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.
The lack of information on the brochures about the USCT units during the battle and their mislabeling on the map represents more than just clerical errors. The lack of recognition for African American involvement represented a continuation of Olustee as a Confederate only commemorative site. Acknowledging the existence of African American troops would mean accepting a different narrative, one in which the defense of slavery replaced the defense of the home as the reason for fighting. By the 1970s, however, the shifting attitudes toward race occurring throughout American society could no longer be ignored. Olustee’s purpose, openly stated during the early Twentieth Century by heritage organizations as a white southern site only, could no longer be accepted in such a candid way. The errors on the brochure highlight the uneasiness at Olustee of portraying African American units, such as the failure to include Colored Troops at the end of the designation United States. That failure indicates an effort on part of the Park Service to provide as little identification of black troops as possible, while still attempting to provide factual information for visitors as to the troop position during the battle.

Further evidence of the Park Service’s collusion with the original purpose of Olustee appeared during the building of a museum in 1955. The 1952 state legislature provided money for the construction of a new custodian’s cottage and a gate-house museum. The park received just over $14,000 for the biennium of 1951-1953. Nearly $7,000 went toward the construction of the custodian’s cottage, as well as water and sewer connections. The museum received $6000 in the budget and construction bids went out to contractors at the end of 1953. The small museum would be built alongside restrooms for the public. It was built west of the 1912 monument, with a large central breezeway dividing the restrooms from the small exhibits room.105

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105 Elizabeth M. Towers, “Highlights of Progress and Accomplishments of the Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, July 1, 1949-May 25, 1953,” Schaeffer files, Florida State Archives; The Florida Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, “Specifications for the Construction of a Three Bedroom Residences and a Museum and Rest...
The small museum opened on August 13, 1955. A dedication ceremony, overseen by State Park Director Emmet L. Hill and Attorney General Richard Ervin, took place at 11 a.m. The museum contained interpretative exhibits and artifacts, many of which had been loaned by the Florida State Museum in Gainesville and the North Carolina History Museum in Raleigh.

Dr. Arnold B. Grobman, the director of the Florida State Museum, created an exhibit with seven cases that included several original artifacts, such as weapons, clothing, and flags. One of the most notable artifacts was the battle flag of Company C, Second Florida Calvary. The unit, also known as Marion Dragoons, fought during the battle. The museum presented a brief interpretation of the battle and its place within Florida’s Civil War history.106

The establishment of state control over the site’s interpretation did not alter the UDC’s original intent. A direct connection between the UDC’s management and the state’s management was made by Emmet L. Hill in the news release announcing the museum’s dedication. Noting that “the reverent hands of the U.D.C. cared for the spot” for over thirty years, Hill also praised the exhibit as one that “will please all individuals and mainly the U.D.C. . . . who for years have strived to honor the illustrious men who fought here.” Hill added that the exhibit would “also clarify to all the causes and nature of this hard fought battle” and “instill in those who see it an interest in Florida’s history during the short lived Confederacy.”107

Furthermore, the UDC remained heavily involved in overseeing the site for the state. The advisory council for the Olustee Battlefield consisted of five members of which two were

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members of the UDC. Mrs. L. A Davis and Mrs. A. P. Holt were both appointed to the council and were active in the UDC. Mrs. L. A. Davis was a past president of the Florida Division of the UDC. Two additional UDC members, Mrs. Fleetwood Howard and Mrs. Russell Frink, were made honorary members of the council.108

The addition of the museum attracted more attention to the site. C. H. Schaeffer, the Chief of Information and Education at Florida State Parks, reported on August 2, 1956 to the Florida State Museum that 7,350 people visited the park in the previous year. Schaeffer estimated that 95% of those visitors also went into the museum. The museum was refurbished and updated during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1967, the breezeway was enclosed to allow more space for museum exhibits and air conditioning installed. Small exhibits were created and installed in 1975 and 1976. The exhibits were placed on a large island built in the middle of the recently enclosed breezeway. Visitors entered from the parking lot and traveled around the island reading panels entitled, “Why We Fought,” “The Federal Campaign in Florida,” and “Saturday, February 20, 1864.” Visitors exited through the rear of the building to encounter the 1912 monument.109

The exhibits expanded upon the earlier ones, but still focused only on the battle of Olustee and offered very little explanation about the larger issues of the war. The “Why We Fight” exhibit offered several examples of the narrative presented at the Olustee museum. The exhibit started with the military situation in 1863 by noting that since the fall of Vicksburg, “the Confederacy became dependent upon its territory east of the Mississippi for food” and the future

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of the war effort “depended largely upon the ability of the Confederacy to secure food in Florida.” That argument signifies the sole reason for southerner’s fighting at Olustee. The northern argument is equally as narrow. Northerners at Olustee fought “to try to win the state back to the Union.” No mention is made of the African American role in the fight or the war throughout any of the exhibits. The exhibits have not been altered since the mid-1970s.110

The inclusion of Olustee Battlefield within the Florida State Park System brought many improvements that the UDC was unable to provide. The state increased funding which subsequently enabled the establishment of new trails, interpretive markers, and a museum. Other aspects of the site, however, did not change. The purpose of the battlefield remained focused on commemorating the Confederate victory over the Union and honoring the memory of the southern soldiers who fought and died at Olustee. That purpose was specifically adopted under state management.


The institutional history of Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park as a Lost Cause shrine influenced the site’s interpretative narrative throughout most of the Twentieth Century and proved resilient against efforts in the recent decades to alter it. Evidence of that resilience can be found in the annual battle reenactment, the Olustee Festival in nearby Lake City, and the 2012 debate over a monument to Union soldiers. Present through all of these events is a reaffirmation of white southern identity along traditional, Lost Cause lines and an unwillingness to adequately address the African American experience during the battle.

During most of the year the public must rely upon the monuments, museum displays, and trail markers, to learn about the battle. There is little interaction between park rangers and the public, since Olustee Battlefield no longer maintains a ranger onsite. A major exception is the annual battle reenactment weekend held every year on the anniversary of the battle. Started with the encouragement of the Florida Park Service, the reenactment has grown to become a major regional event bringing in thousands of visitors and millions of dollars to the local economy. In spite of concerns and even protests, however, the annual commemoration continues to showcase a narrow interpretation of the battle and provides an outlet for white southerners to commemorate the battle of Olustee, as well as their Confederate heritage.

The Olustee Battle Reenactment has grown from less than 300 reenactors in 1977 to a high of 1,500 reenactors in 1991. Support for the reenactment weekend grew in 1979 when nearby Lake City began hosting an Olustee Festival during the weekend, featuring local crafts, food, a parade, and more recently a reenactment of the Monitor and Merrimack battle in a nearby lake.111 Occurring simultaneously with the reenactment weekend at the battlefield, the Olustee Festival provides more outlets for local businesses to cater to visitors and showcase the larger

Lake City area. The main battle reenactment takes place on Sunday in front of crowds that have, in the past, exceeded over ten thousand.¹¹²

The event occurs on the closest weekend to the anniversary of the battle in February and has developed a set schedule since the 1980s. Reenactors arrive and set up camp on Wednesday and Thursday. Confederate soldiers camp on the western portion of the battlefield, on the same ground where Confederate soldiers formed up and fought the battle. Union reenactors camp on the eastern side of the battlefield, also close to where Union soldiers fought the battle. A sutler’s village is established just to the south of the Confederate camp, right across from the museum and monuments.¹¹³

On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday visitors can attend the park and visit both Union and Confederate camps. Reenactors, sutlers, and park rangers are on hand to answer questions and discuss the battle. School children arrive on Friday for special tours of the battlefield, while the majority of other visitors arrive on Saturday and Sunday. A practice reenactment, known as a skirmish, occurs on Saturday afternoon. Sunday’s official reenactment portrays in miniature the actual battle of Olustee and has in recent years included over 1500 reenactors. This reenactment takes place on a cleared field within the historical battlefield, with the audience watching from bleachers on the south side of the field. Estimates of the audience range from 10,000 to 15,000 spectators for the Sunday reenactments. All of these sites, such as the camps and the reenactment field, are located on federal land in the Osceola National Forest. The Florida Park Service and USFS are the two main government institutions involved in the annual reenactment

weekend, but local organizations and individuals are central to understanding the growth of the reenactment weekend since 1977.114

Figure 8. Reenactment Map, 1980s. “State Historic Site-Olustee,” Jim Stevenson Collection, Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.

The idea for a reenactment at Olustee stretches back to the Centennial commemoration in 1964. Letters addressed to Adam G. Adams, chairman of the Florida Civil War Centennial Commission, mention the possibilities of reenacting the battle at the battlefield. Small ceremonies took place during the centennial in Lake City and Olustee. There was no reenactment at the battlefield, but a reenactment did take place at the Gator Bowl stadium in Jacksonville of February 22, 1964, in front of five thousand spectators. The festivities included a parade, barbecue, and a costume ball.\textsuperscript{115}

The impetus for the Olustee Park reenactment occurred during the Bicentennial in 1976. Florida, like many other states, used the bicentennial year to commemorate state history, hoping for an economic gain from the public’s increased awareness of the past. Florida created the Bicentennial Commission in 1970 with a mandate to catalog “the sites . . . which are appropriate for preservation or development in commemoration of the American Revolution or other historical events.” Several historic sites were improved with new signs, exhibits, and other updates. A guidebook, \textit{Florida Bicentennial Trail: A Heritage Revisited}, detailed the five hundred years of Florida history through fifty-two historic sites. Small blurbs, along with directions to the site, appeared in the guidebook. For example, Olustee is considered important because it was the largest Civil War battle in the state and where “Confederate forces turned back the Federal invaders.”\textsuperscript{116}

The Park Service sought to improve Olustee’s landscape and to renovate many of the trail markers and the museum, in order to take advantage of the increased visitation generated by the

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Likewise, Jim Stevenson, the Chief of Interpretive Services in the Department of Natural Resources, sought out participants for a battle reenactment at Olustee during the anniversary of the battle in February 1976. Members of the First Regiment of Florida Volunteer Infantry, an active reenactment group, volunteered and began requesting other reenactors from across the state. Unfortunately, Stevenson made the request in late January 1976, which did not allow for enough time to organize the men and equipment needed for a battle reenactment in February. Instead the reenactment was postponed until February 1977.

The organization of the event was spread out among several different institutions. Permission and oversight were needed from the U.S. National Forest and the Florida Department of Natural Resources, Division of Recreation and Parks. The Columbia County Historical Society and the Lake City Reporter assisted in publicizing the event. The First Regiment Florida Volunteers, a reenactor organization, hosted the event and took charge of the logistics during the reenactment. One of these individuals, Dr. Raymond E. Giron, would go on to play an important role in continuing the event over the next thirty years.

The first reenactment at Olustee was a small affair, considering the large crowds at subsequent reenactments. Yellow flyers, proclaiming “Sound the Alarm and alert the troops for the Battle of Olustee,” were distributed throughout the state and the southeast. Nearly 300 reenactors answered the call for the first reenactment and performed in front of approximately 3,000 people in the audience.

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117 Ney Landrum to Frank Finison, March 25, 1975, “Use Permit-Olustee Battlefield,” Jim Stevenson Collection, Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.
118 Historical Research Committee, The Battle of Olustee, 7.
120 Sound the Alarm flyer, “Permanent Park Files-Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site,” Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.
Figure 9. Flyer advertising the first Olustee reenactment, 1977. “Permanent Park Files-Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site,” Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.
That first reenactment set a precedent for subsequent reenactments. The majority of activities were planned for Saturday and Sunday, including a skirmish on Saturday and the battle reenactment on Sunday. Both Union and Confederate camps were open to the public, albeit only from 10am to 1pm on both days. A parade took place on Saturday afternoon, during which the reenactors marched through downtown Lake City.122

The Park Service established another precedent when it relinquished sole responsibility for historical interpretation and shared it with local organizations and individuals. A meeting between the various organizations took place in November 1976. Historical interpretation for visitors was split between the Division of Recreation and Parks (DRP), under Jim Stevenson, and the First Regiment Florida Volunteers. The DRP took charge of providing the narration during the reenactment and giving “a handout for each visitor.” The First Regiment created “a detailed schedule of activities” and provided information “to all participants about the history of the battle and their roles.”123 Splitting responsibility for interpretation with the First Florida Regiment downplayed the interpretational role of the Florida Park Service, allowing an outside organization to control the narrative.124

Reenactors conduct several activities during the reenactment weekend. Participation in the battle reenactment on Sunday remained the highlight of the yearly commemoration, but as the reenactment weekend got bigger so too did the roles of reenactors. Both the Union and Confederate camps were open to the public on Saturday and Sunday, allowing visitors to walk among the tents and visit with the reenactors. The open camps, limited to only a few hours on

123 Steering Committee Letter from Jim Stevenson, Nov. 12, 1976, “Permanent Park Files-Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site,” Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.
Saturday and Sunday in 1977, later expanded to include Friday as well as more hours during the weekend. By the early 1990s, the Olustee reenactment covered three days and provided several activities, such as drill competitions, medical tent demonstrations, and a Blue-Grey Ball on Saturday night. Reenactors interacted with the public throughout the three days, from one-on-one conversations during the open camps to scheduled talks with the public about a variety of Civil War subjects, such as medical practices or paper money. Fridays were scheduled for school groups throughout Columbia and Baker County to visit the battlefield. School groups were led along the battlefield trail and met with reenactors at various points to learn more about the war and the battle.125

Since its inception, the Olustee reenactment depended on the involvement of reenactment groups. Many of them are locally organized or based within the state of Florida. The First Florida Regiment of Volunteers and the National Reenactment of Society of Volunteers were the only two organizations represented in 1977. The Blue-Grey Army, Inc., a Lake City based organization, has overseen the organization and recruitment of reenactors at Olustee since 1979 and all reenactment units are required to register with them to participate. During the early 1990s, the Blue-Grey Army, Inc. also partnered with the Olustee Battlefield Citizen’s Support Organization, a volunteer group officially attached to the Olustee State Historic State Site, to oversee the reenactment event. Both organizations also contain representatives from the Florida Park Service and the U.S. National Forest Service. The Blue-Grey Army, Inc. remains the primary organizer of the Battle Reenactment and the Olustee Festival.126


Many of the reenactors belong to groups that portray historical units, such as the First Florida Regiment of Volunteers, Co. F of the Seventh Florida Volunteer Infantry, or the One Hundred-Fifteenth Regiment New York State Volunteer Infantry. Membership in a reenactment unit requires the payment of dues, purchase of authentic replicas, and participation in scheduled drills and events. The membership of groups often never matched the size of their historical predecessor. A reenactment group with fifty active members would be considered a very large unit. Despite the limitation of size, most units organized along the lines of historical military regulations. For example, the One Hundred-Fifteenth NY reenactment unit usually depicted Co. A of the One Hundred-Fifteenth NY regiment, with the commander of the unit holding the rank of First or 2nd Lieutenant. As with other private clubs, new members could expect to spend a certain amount of time as low ranked soldiers until leadership slots opened up in the organization.127

Many of the reenactment units have manuals that describe the organization’s rules, as well as instructions for how to dress and act like a soldier in the Civil War. The One Hundred-Fifteenth NY manual provides a brief overview of the unit’s hierarchy, each soldier’s responsibilities, a list of the equipment required by each soldier, and rules regarding safety and behavior. A listing of equipment insures uniformity throughout the regiment, while also guaranteeing some consistency to historical accuracy. For example the One Hundred-Fifteenth manual insists upon a three-band Springfield or Enfield rifle, since that was the rifle issued to the historical regiment. A soldier equipped with a Spencer breech loading rifle would not be permitted because that rifle, though in existence during the war, was not commonly used by Union infantrymen in the One Hundred-Fifteenth. Reenactor manuals greatly stressed the

historical accuracy of the individual soldier, the unit, and the camps. The One Hundred-Fifteenth manual forbade modern eyewear, jewelry, and wristwatches. Televisions and radios were not allowed in the campsite. Some modern items, such as coolers, were allowed, but must be hidden from the view of the public.128

Other manuals went into greater detail about the historical accuracy required from participants. Company F of the Seventh Florida Volunteer Infantry provided several pages to its members on how to create a Civil War persona. This included a list of agricultural terms to use in conversations, such as “chopping cotton” or “fodder pulling,” and a brief description of life in Florida in the 1850s and 1860s. The Seventh Florida’s manual even included census and statistical data on Orange County, Florida, the home county of the historical unit.129

An emphasis on historical detail, particularly toward the clothing and equipment of soldiers, is a point of pride for many reenactors. The hobby itself reinforces this fact through self-policing and shaming. Units require a certain level of accuracy and punish those members who blunder, such as by wearing a wrist watch. Punishments range from extra fines and clean up duty to expulsion from the unit. Culturally speaking, the hobby shames participants who fail in the historical accuracy of their appearance. The term “farb” is used by participants to describe a reenactor whose appearance is either too ostentatious, phony looking, or historically incorrect.130 Michael D. Strauss’ study of Civil War reenactors concluded that the presence of “farbs” at events constituted “significant compromises in authenticity” culminating, in the

opinion of serious reenactors, “as an assault upon the foundations of the reenacting hobby.”

The fixation on historical accuracy in dress and equipment permeates the reenactment community.

Olustee’s reenactment has been very popular among Confederate reenactment groups since the beginning, far outnumbering Union reenactors. References about Confederate reenactor’s forcing to be “galvanized” as Union soldiers appeared in 1977. The next year, Dr. Ray Giron, spokesman for the First Florida Regiment, mentioned to a reporter that “Hopefully, we will have more ‘Yankees’ than we did last year.” The term “galvanized” is a reference to the historical recruitment of Confederate prisoners of war to join the Union army. Reenactors used the term to denote the practice of participating as both a Union and Confederate soldier during a reenactment depending on which side had less bodies. Confederate reenactors have outnumbered Union reenactors nearly every year since. The disparity annually impacted the historical representation of the reenactment. Following the 1987 reenactment, a reenactor from the One Hundred-Fifteenth New York reported to Jim Stevenson that the size of the Confederate army appeared nearly three times as large as the Union army during the battle reenactment. Such a depiction was grossly inaccurate, since historically both sides were of equal strength during the battle.

The Florida Park Service, by the 1980s, had relinquished much of the control over historical interpretation to reenactors during the Olustee Battle Reenactment weekend. The notation of “Ray” appeared next to each of the complaints made by the One Hundred-Fifteenth

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133 Audrey Dunham, Shots Ring Out Again at Olustee (Rough Draft), “Permanent Park Files-Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site,” Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives.
NY in 1987. Dr. Ray Giron’s involvement with the reenactment, first as an officer in the First Florida Regiment and later on as a member of the Blue-Grey Army, Inc., only grew as the event got bigger. The question of authenticity, at least in the eyes of the Florida Park Service, was best solved by the reenactors themselves. That solution extended well beyond just questions of clothing or participation in the battle reenactment.

Many reenactment groups emphasized knowledge of the material culture of the Civil War while often neglecting the advancements in scholarship on other aspects of the war. The same differences that permeated the American public’s understanding of the war also existed within the reenactment community. Reenactor’s represented a distinct group of people who, for various reasons, have decided to spend their free time (and a considerable amount of money) recreating a specific point in American history. Most of these individuals expressed an intense interest in the Civil War, however their understanding of the war could greatly differ from individual to individual. The responsibility of reenactors as interpreters at Olustee’s reenactment enhanced the importance of these distinctions, particularly as pertained to their role as educators and representatives of the Florida State Park Service.

The prevalence of Confederate reenactors, many who are local Floridians, insured that the interpretation presented to visitors retained much of the traditional interpretation already evident at the battle site on the monuments and in the museum. Company F, Seventh Florida Volunteer Infantry reenactment unit participated in the Olustee Reenactment during the 1980s and 1990s. Their manual described in detail the historical persona required of its members when performing Living History routines or discussing history with the public. As mentioned earlier, the manual listed several colloquial terms from the 1860s and census data from Orange County.
Following that information was a short essay on the history of slavery in the South, detailing how slaves and white southerner’s interacted with one another:

Most of the elaborate cruelties that are depicted in novels and movies are so much bull thought up by people who have never actually studied or researched the subject of plantation life or if they have it was from books like “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”, “Mandingo” and other fictional trash books which were written by other stupid people who knew little or nothing about the subject.

The manual supports this assertion by noting that Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, was a “Yankee Broad that had never been South at the time she wrote the book.”

The manual describes slavery as a benign institution and provides a Lost Cause narrative of slavery. The manual explains that “slavery was no picnic,” but that it was not nearly as bad as “depicted by the Yankee Abolishionist press.” Slaves received good housing, food, and care from their owners because they represented an investment on the part of their owners. The physical punishment of slaves was light because “a scarred-up slave was less worth a good price as he would be recognized by a prospective buyer as a trouble maker.” Owners encouraged slave marriages and families because it produced offspring that were valuable to the owners and because “it also made for contented, less troublesome slaves too.” Finally, owners did not break up slave families on purpose “unless the owner was forced to do so by circumstances such as a threatened foreclosure by a Northern bank.”

The sexual relationship between owners and slaves also received considerable attention. The occurrence was not completely dismissed, but the manual does label it as “one other bit of Yankee propaganda that is overplayed.” When it did occur, the reader is assured that it was “not nearly as often as we are led to believe.” The example to support such a claim is that plantation owners made rules against such indiscretions. Relationships between white women and black

136 Company F, Seventh Florida, 5.
men probably occurred, because “if she had any class at all she would have died first before letting anyone find out about it.”  

Slavery, as depicted in the Seventh Florida manual, resembled the interpretations of early Twentieth Century scholars and Lost Cause adherents. The unsavory nature of slavery’s existence was recognized, although the manual softens this fact by insinuating that slavery was a business transaction with labor being exchanged for food, clothing, and housing. Such an interpretation removes the racial animosity that American slavery embedded in the culture and society. The manual further dismissed the unique experiences of slaves by repeating older justifications for slavery as “better than what followed the war such as sharecropping or…being a worker in a northern factory.” Such a conclusion parrots other widely held white southern perceptions of slavery, race, and the legacy of the war that were common during the height of the Lost Cause movement.

The Seventh Florida manual’s description of why soldiers went off to war paralleled the description of slavery. Entitled “Why did you go off to war,” this section advanced the traditional interpretations that stressed the legality of secession and state’s rights. The manual argues that the Confederate soldier fought “for his freedom” and “because it was the only American war going at the time.” No further explanation is presented to defend the first point, with the writer specifically stating that fighting of one’s freedom is “self explanatory (sic).” The second point received more elaboration, by mostly assuming southern men found farming “extremely boring.” War apparently provided an adventure or escape from the monotony of farm life.

137 Company F, Seventh Florida, 5.
138 Company F, Seventh Florida, 5.
139 Company F, Seventh Florida, 8.
The “Why did you go off to war?” section offered a guide to new members on why Confederate soldiers fought in the war, while also distancing the interpreter from any connections to the defense of slavery. Contradictions abound in the writing due to the efforts that are undertaken to avoid any acknowledgement towards slavery as a reason to fight. The notion that southern soldiers fought to defend slavery is dismissed as “Yankee propaganda.” The new members are then informed that most men in the company were not slaveholders and had “a fifty percent chance of being illiterate.” The environments of their home counties are described as fairly rural, with few newspapers and a reliance on word of mouth for outside news. Following that description, the manual states a rhetorical question: “How did these people know about current events?”

All of these descriptions are contradicted in the next few paragraphs. The illiterate, poor farmers in one paragraph, who know little about the outside world, are suddenly labeled “average educated Southerners,” who are “familiar enough with the constitution to know that secession was legal and believed in the Right of Secession by every State as well as State’s Rights . . . over any Federal laws or edicts.” The lack of knowledge about current events seems like a false assumption once the reader learns that travelers were often questioned about news and that “newspapers were brought in by merchants via the river boats.” Other events, such as “monthly militia meetings, church meetings, and . . . other social gatherings” provided the folks throughout the county with ample opportunities to meet and exchange information.

As with the Lost Cause interpretations concerning secession, the reenactors in the Seventh Florida learned that secession was a perfectly legal and justified response to the election of Lincoln, who “would be a tool of the Northern Supremists (sic) and the Abolishion (sic)

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140 Company F, Seventh Florida, 8.
141 Company F, Seventh Florida, 8.
movement.” The interpretation presented here, however, is not that slavery was being defended by southerners, but that abolitionists and radicals in the North were bent upon destroying the constitutional rights of southerners. Moreover, it was hinted that Lincoln’s election was not valid because “he was elected without any Southern votes to speak of . . . and none in the electoral (sic) college vote.” This particular interpretation, part of the traditional narrative, emphasized the perception of the North bullying the South and justified secession as the only recourse.142

Finally, the ambiguities evident within this particular interpretation of the secession crisis are laid aside with the assertion that “the actions of the Lincoln government in invading the South was a threat to all Southerners.”143 The defense of home argument remains the hallmark of apologetic Southerners from 1861 all the way to the present. Such a view removes guilt from the individual, making their service both simple and noble at the same time. It is a convincing argument that appeals to many individuals through the romantic portrayal of the innocent person being forced to defend their homes, families, and lives against the invaders without contradicting those ideals with the guilt of responsibility. It is absolution.

The manual provides new members of the Seventh Florida with the tools in which to approach the public as a “representative” of the past. The emphasis on the appearance of the individual provides a foundation of knowledge that can be exploited when the conversation shifts from material culture toward ideology. If a reenactor looked the part, then his knowledge on the war must be equally valid. The causes of the war, the role of slavery, and the reasons for secession are often interpreted through the lens of the Lost Cause and, in some cases, represent a contemporary view of society and politics instead of the historic past. Many of the Confederate

142 Company F, Seventh Florida, 8.
143 Company F, Seventh Florida, 8.
reenactors at the Olustee actively participate in continuing the Lost Cause interpretation of the site with very little control on the part of the Florida Park Service.

The most problematic aspect with the park’s interpretation concerns the presence of African American troops at the Battle of Olustee. The Park Service has made several attempts over the past thirty years to incorporate black soldiers into the official interpretation at Olustee. The inclusion of that story complicated the traditional interpretation at Olustee, which focused on the valiant Confederate soldiers repelling the invading Federals. The mere presence of USCT units highlights the racial aspects of the war, such as the role of slavery in causing the war and sustaining the Confederacy. Moreover, the mistreatment of black soldiers following the battle represents a visceral reminder of the racial animosity present between Confederate soldiers and black Union soldiers. The efforts of the Park Service and private organizations to control both interpretations have sporadically emerged within the public debate during the past thirty years.

Olustee Battlefield State Historic Site started addressing African American history in the 1970s. Memos between Jim Stevenson and the State Archives emphasized new avenues of interpretation based upon “the recent emphasis on ethnic and minority history.” William Thurston, Chief Preservation Planner, mentioned the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment “could provide a link by which to tie this campaign and battle to the broader subject of the black experience in the War.” No real change occurred at the park, however, until the late 1980s. African American participation in the reenactment increased during the 1980s partially due to the popularity of the movie Glory, which depicted the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts regiment.144

In 1996, a new park film offered more information on the battle of Olustee and the role of African American soldiers. Much of the movie was filmed at the annual reenactment. The

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144 William Thurston to Jim Stevenson, May 12, 1975, “Interpretative Exhibits-Tour and Exhibits at Olustee Battlefield,” Florida Park Service Historic Collections and Archives, 5-6.
Florida Park Service, the Olustee Battlefield Citizens Support Organization, and the Department of Media and Community Information at Lake City Community College cooperated to produce the film. The film lasted approximately forty-five minutes and detailed a brief history of Florida’s role in the war before describing the Olustee Campaign. Voice actors read letters, diary entries, and reports from Union and Confederate primary sources. A particular highlight of the film shows an interview of Lonnie Parker, whose father served in the Confederate Army at Olustee.

The documentary provides more historical detail about African American troops than anything else at Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park up to that time. The actions of the Eighth U.S.C.T. are given a good deal of attention. The film notes the unit’s poor weapons and training, but adds that despite all of those limitations the unit showed great determination during the fight. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of the First North Carolina (Colored) and Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts holding the field while the Union Army retreated toward the end of the film.

The video also briefly addressed the killing of captured black soldiers by Confederate soldiers. The narration claimed that “roaming bands of southern troops” killed black soldiers following the battle and labels it a “regrettable episode.” Lasting only twenty seconds, this brief mention is the only interpretation of the event at the park. The film never mentions slavery or the racial animosity between Confederate soldiers and black soldiers, providing absolutely no context for the viewers. Its inclusion at all is more than likely due to the script writer of the film, Dr. David J. Coles, who authored an essay on the racially motivated killings at Olustee.

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The inclusion of African American soldiers into the narrative at Olustee challenges the traditional Lost Cause interpretation, albeit both can still exist side by side on a superficial level. Further interrogation, however, of the racial atrocities committed by Confederate soldiers following the battle would devastate the Lost Cause view. Delving into the aftermath of the battle underlines the racial animosities present between Confederate soldiers and black Union soldiers during the Civil War. Furthermore, the awareness of that animosity places doubt on the Lost Cause view of slavery as a benign institution. From there, other aspects of pro southern view of the war begin to fall away. The moral bulwark of southerners defending home becomes tarnished by scenes of racially motivated killings. That partly explains the lack of any mention of the atrocities at Olustee. The interpretation, particularly in the museum, at Olustee endeavors to maintain a narrow analysis on the events that occurred there during February 20, 1864. Any inquiry into the treatment of African American soldiers after the battle opens up the visitor to a larger exploration on the themes of slavery, race, and morality during the war.

Despite these advancements, the park remains primarily a space for Confederate heritage. The overall tenor of the reenactment weekend, influenced in part by the individual stance of Confederate reenactors, provides support for the continuation of the Lost Cause interpretation of the battle. Alongside individual reenactors, Lost Cause heritage organizations such as the UDC and Sons of Confederate Veterans set up booths to recruit members. Traditional symbols of the Confederacy are exhibited throughout the encampment, sold by sutlers, and worn by visitors. The League of the South provides free copies of its newspaper, The Free Magnolia, to all visitors.

This bias toward the Confederate side of the narrative extends into the Olustee Festival in Lake City, with the Saturday parade of reenactors primarily composed of Confederate soldiers.
and prominent displays of the battle flag. During the early 2000s, the NAACP launched a protest against the depiction of the Confederate battle flag during the parade, as well as, its depiction on the city seal of Lake City. Nearly 70 protesters, representing the NAACP and the Green Party, protested the depiction of the battle flag during the annual Olustee Festival parade on February 17, 2001. Supporters of the flag stood across Duval Street from the protestors. Newspaper reports indicated that when “Union soldiers in the parade paused near supporters of the Confederate flag, spectators booed loudly and started yelling the lyrics to Dixie.” Likewise a group of Confederate reenactors were cheered loudly by the crowd. The following year, the head of the Lake City NAACP, Glenel Bowden, was arrested for putting up fliers advertising another protest. Following his release, the protest went on as planned. Countering the NAACP that year were more supporters of the battle flag, including representatives of the League of the South. In light of the city’s refusal to remove the battle flag from the city seal, the NAACP instituted an economic boycott against the city on Jan. 25, 2002.

The legacy of Olustee Battlefield State Park as a Confederate only memorial site was reaffirmed during the fall of 2013. The Florida Division of the Sons of Union Veterans proposed to place a monument dedicated to Union soldiers near the 1912 monument. This resulted in a concerted backlash among locals and heritage organizations. One of the monument’s detractors urged the state to recognize the original purpose of the UDC-led commemoration at the site as history also by stating:

The Florida legislature record is clear. The express purpose of this site is to honor the veterans of Florida and her allies in defending Florida from invasion…THIS site, and its

148 “Lake City’s Battle over Confederate Flag with NAACP leads to Arrest, Protest,” Jacksonville Free Press, February 27, 2002.
historical purpose and integrity thereof, is clearly to honor the defenders of Florida not the invaders of our State.149

Facing concerted opposition, including a town hall meeting during which detractors of the monument launched into singing Dixie while waving the battle flag, the Florida Park Service has tabled plans to erect a Union Monument.

Present through all of these events is the reaffirmation of white southern identity along traditional Lost Cause lines leading to an inability to adequately address the African American experience during the battle. White Floridians regarded the erection of a Union monument as an intrusion into the pro-Confederate space at Olustee. The presence of a Union monument would highlight the role of black troops at Olustee, resulting in a concession from the traditional Lost Cause interpretation of the battle and the war. The descriptive language used by the monument’s detractors expounds on that fear and echoes the same concerns mentioned over a hundred years earlier. Once again, white Floridians invoked the theme of invasion, but this version contained specifically racialized invaders by describing the proposed memorial as a “grotesque monument” and deliberately comparing it to a “black phallus.”150 The imagery of the language invokes the Jim Crow era narrative of the black brute ravaging white femininity. Descriptions of the 1912 monument as “the ‘Old Girl’” and the multiple usages of the feminine pronoun “she” to describe the battlefield further support the argument.151 Dovetailing with the racial predatory descriptions of the “invaders” is the awareness of an interpretational shift in Civil War scholarship, particularly during the current sesquicentennial. Proponents of the monument wanted to correct

“a perceived imbalance” at Olustee. Instead they encountered stiff resistance and demands that the state protect a site from a group adamantly convinced that outsiders are bent on destroying their white, southern, pro-Confederate space.

The importance of Olustee to Florida’s white Civil War memory ensures that the racial aspects of the battle will continue to be downplayed in favor of a triumphant white southern narrative emphasizing defense of home. The presence of black troops at Olustee, and the subsequent murder of unarmed black soldiers following the battle, has never found a comfortable place in the state’s interpretation of the battle. Olustee, commemorated by the state in 1912 as a Confederate only memorial and operated by the United Daughters of the Confederacy for nearly forty years, remains indelible imbued with the traditional narrative. Challenging that narrative will be difficult because of the institutional history of the site and the submission of the Florida Park Service to outside organizations for interpretational programming.

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CHAPTER III: POISON SPRINGS AND JENKINS’ FERRY

Driving through southern central Arkansas, one could be forgiven for not noticing Poison Springs Battleground State Park or Jenkins’ Ferry Battleground State Park. Located on state highways 76 and 9, respectively, neither park encompasses more than a hundred acres. Both sites can be easily missed by visitors amidst the budding flowers of spring or the bright colors of fall’s foliage, not to mention their location along winding country roads with fifty-five mile per hour speed limits. Despite their small size, these unmanned parks commemorate two of the bloodiest battles fought during the Camden Expedition. The development of each site as a state park in the last fifty years ultimately confronted the tense racial animosity that appeared on Civil War battlefields between white Confederate and black Union soldiers.

Commemoration at the battlefields of the Camden Expedition did not occur until well into the Twentieth Century. The Expedition’s lack of an impact on the wider war effort is the most likely reason why commemoration efforts were focused elsewhere in Arkansas. For example, two monuments were erected on the Pea Ridge battlefield in the 1880s and several UDC monuments were erected in the 1900s and 1910s in Little Rock. The memorialization of Poison Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry, however, was only organized by local UDC groups in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Further commemorative efforts did not occur until the establishment of state control over the battlefields in the 1960s.153

The development of both sites, established as state parks during the centennial of the war, also paralleled the professionalization of historic site interpretation within the Arkansas State Park agency. Building upon the small amount of memorialization by local UDC organizations, Arkansas State Parks developed innovative ways to tell the story of the campaign and its battles through automobile tours and static interpretative exhibit panels. The agency sought to move beyond the older memorialization, represented by UDC monuments at both sites, and offer contextualization of each battle within the larger Camden Expedition. When the state, assisted by academic scholars, created exhibits in the 1990s that emphasized the racial tensions of the war, it challenged the older narratives and caused a conflict with members of the local community. The state’s determination to incorporate new scholarship contradicting the traditional, pro-southern narrative represented a growing emphasis on fact-based interpretation within Arkansas State Parks since the 1970s. Though ultimately successful in placing the new exhibits at Poison Springs, the subsequent public debate stymied further development at Jenkins’ Ferry. Arkansas State Parks, despite being dedicated to the mission of educating Arkansans on all the aspects of their heritage, could not fully dismiss the traditional narratives about the battles. Nevertheless, this debate signified a larger discussion about the historical complexities of Civil War Arkansas that continued through the sesquicentennial.

The interpretative challenges faced by Arkansas State Parks at Poison Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry stemmed directly from the fiasco that was the Camden Expedition. Since the fall of Vicksburg in July 1863, military operations in Arkansas took on a minor role. The Union focus in 1864 would be on the Georgia and Virginia. In Arkansas, the Union army contained Confederate forces in the southwestern portion of the state during 1863, while occupying key locations in the state such as Little Rock and Fort Smith. Poor road conditions and limited
supplies prevented either side from launching large scale operations. Consequently, bushwhacking, guerrilla operations, and cavalry raids occurred more frequently and made any Union foray into rural Arkansas a dangerous endeavor. The Camden Expedition occurred within this setting in the spring of 1864.

Union Major General Frederick Steele, commanding the Department of Arkansas, undertook the Camden Expedition as a secondary campaign to Major General Nathanial Banks’ Red River Campaign in Louisiana. Steele’s role in the campaign was to support Banks’ movement up the Red River by marching from Little Rock to Shreveport, Louisiana. If successful, both armies would execute a successful pincer movement around Shreveport, an important Confederate base and the headquarters for the Department of the Trans-Mississippi. Steele strongly disagreed with the plan due to the lack of manpower in Arkansas, poor supply lines, and bad roads. In spite of his misgivings, Steele organized 6,800 men in Little Rock and left in late March 1864. Steele’s army joined Brigadier General John M. Thayer’s Frontier Division of 3,600 men, marching from Fort Smith, on April 9. Steele’s forces, numbering around 10,000 men continued marching south by southwest toward Shreveport and also threatening Washington, the Confederate capital in Arkansas.\textsuperscript{154}

Steele never succeeded in reaching Shreveport and provided minimal assistance to Banks’ Red River campaign. The resulting debacle of the Camden Expedition for Union forces reflected Steele’s earlier concerns about the planned operation. The roads and terrain slowed his army and resupplying became harder with each passing day. Confederate forces, under Major General Sterling Price, attacked Steele’s troops at a crossroads to the east of Washington.

Lasting over several days, the Battle of Prairie De Ann forced Steele to divert his force from heading south toward Shreveport, to heading east toward Camden. Steele was unable to support his army in the countryside and headed to Camden in order to wait for supplies sent from Little Rock and Pine Bluff. Federal forces occupied Camden on April 15th, marking the high point of the Camden Expedition and the removal of Steele’s participation in the Red River Campaign.\textsuperscript{155}

Steele set up a base in Camden while waiting for resupply. In the meantime, he sent out foraging parties into the surrounding countryside to collect any food or fodder that could be found. On April 17, Steele ordered Col. James W. Williams to investigate reports of a cache of five thousand bushels of corn located west of Camden. Williams, commander of the First Kansas Colored Infantry, took 438 men from his own regiment along with 674 infantrymen from Iowa and Kansas white regiments. His escort also received four pieces of artillery to protect the 198 wagons sent along for the corn. The escort collected the corn and turned back toward Camden on April 18.\textsuperscript{156}

Unbeknownst to Williams, Confederate Brigadier General Samuel B. Maxey and Brigadier General John S. Marmaduke deployed nearly 3,300 cavalrymen along the road about ten miles west of Camden. The Battle of Poison Springs began when Williams’ convoy confronted the Confederate forces around ten o’clock in the morning. Union troops, outnumbered three to one, managed a solid defense until overwhelmed by numerical superiority and artillery crossfire between one and two p.m. Abandoning most of the wagons, the remnants


\textsuperscript{156} Gregory J.W. Urwin, “‘We Cannot Treat Negroes…as Prisoners of War:’ Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in Civil War Arkansas,” in \textit{Black Flag Over Dixie: Racial Atrocities and Reprisals in the Civil War} (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 133.
of Williams’ retreated toward Camden with the first arriving in the city around eight o’clock that night.157

Confederate forces won a resounding victory at Poison Springs and prevented Steele from receiving the supply of corn. Casualties on the Union side were appalling, with nearly thirty percent of those engaged killed, wounded, or missing. The First Kansas suffered the most casualties with 182 killed and wounded out of 438 soldiers. A casualty rate of nearly forty-two percent is extreme, but even more telling was the difference between killed and wounded. The First Kansas recorded 117 dead and 65 wounded, which is a ratio of 1.8:1 killed to wounded. This irregularity between killed and wounded did not go unnoticed at the time. A cavalryman in the Third Missouri noted “that the number of our killed exceeds the number of our wounded in this engagement, an unusual occurrence in warfare of the present day, as it is generally found from the reports of many battles being daily fought in our land, to be the contrary.” The soldier observed that such a disparity was caused by an “inhuman and blood thirsty enemy . . . engaged in killing the wounded wherever found.”158

Several accounts by Confederate sources commented on the killing of wounded or surrendering black soldiers. Following the battle, a Texas artilleryman wrote: “The surprise of the enemy was complete – at least 400 darkies were killed. [N]o black prisoners were captured.”159 Some Arkansans were ordered to drive the captured wagons off the battlefield. Several of them competed to see who could drive over and crush the heads of dead and wounded black soldiers. A regiment of Confederate Choctaw Indians, under the command of Colonel

157 Eicher, Longest Night, 653; Baker, Camden Expedition, 10-13; Urwin, “We Cannot Treat Negroes . . . ,” 133-134.
158 Baker, Camden Expedition, 13-14; A. W. M. Petty, A History of the Third Missouri Cavalry from Its Organization at Palmyra, Missouri, 1861, up to November Sixth, 1864: With an Appendix and Recapitulation (Little Rock: J. William Denby, 1865), 76.
Tandy Walker, murdered, scalped, and stripped at least forty black troops. A soldier in the Thirty-Fourth Arkansas reported that “they took no prisoners” and “would shoot a negro as long as he could breathe.”

The role of Native Americans in the battle would later be emphasized in literature and local memory of the battle. The stereotype of savagery offered a non-white explanation for the massacre to many Arkansans and provided a way in which to discuss the massacre without implicating white Confederate soldiers. As late as the 1990s, descriptions of the battle emphasized the horror of the battlefield by mentioning the scalping of white soldiers alongside the murder of wounded black soldiers. The catalyst for such hatred resulted also from a previous battle between the Choctaw Indians and the First Kansas. Several of the Choctaw units contained veterans that fought against the First Kansas in the Battle of Honey Springs during the previous year. Defeated in that battle, several narratives specifically mention that the Choctaws desired vengeance against the First Kansas. The emphasis on Choctaws as the main instigator of violence reemerged during the 1990s when Arkansas State Parks decided to replace older exhibits at the battlefield.

Noticeably absent in older interpretations of the battle was the presence of the Twenty-Ninth Texas Cavalry and their interaction with the First Kansas at Honey Springs. The Texans also took revenge on the First Kansas at Poison Springs because of the Battle of Honey Springs. The First Kansas routed the Twenty-Ninth Texas during the battle. At Poison Springs, the Texans took revenge against wounded black soldiers of the First Kansas. Confederate soldiers

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reportedly roamed the battlefield killing survivors while calling out “Where is the First Nigger now?” and answering “All cut to pieces and gone to hell by bad management.”

The example of white Texans taunting wounded black soldiers and seeking revenge for Honey Springs highlighted the predominance of violence within the southern slave society. Slavery rests upon the idea of complete control over the slave by the master. Support for that view appeared in the development of a racial hierarchy, in which white men are at the top and are unchallenged by all those in categories below them. Challenges to that hierarchy, such as armed black men, resulted in extreme violence in order to right a perceived imbalance to the natural order. Violence was viewed by southern white men as necessary in order to maintain their place within in the hierarchy, as well as, reinforce their own perceptions of masculinity. Defeat by black soldiers had shamed the Twenty-Ninth Texas at Honey Springs and the atrocities committed at Poison Springs reasserted their standing as white southern men.

Steele abandoned the attempt to reach Shreveport shortly after the defeat at Poison Springs due to the inability of maintaining an army in enemy territory. Steele’s forces remained in Camden until April 26, when they abandoned the town and headed back toward Little Rock. The army marched north along the Princeton Road (present day State Highway 9). Steele’s army arrived in Sandy Springs (present day Leola) on April 29. Steele established a rearguard on the northeast side of Sandy Springs while pushing the head of his army toward the Saline River, four miles away. Heavy rains caused the river to overwhelm its banks and created a quagmire of mud for soldiers. Unable to cross the swollen river, Steele had to wait for his engineers to construct rubber pontoon bridges in order to get the army across. Late in the afternoon, Steele’s army was strung out along a four mile road from Sandy Springs to the Jenkins’ Ferry crossing along the

Saline River. Confederate forces arrived that afternoon and began skirmishing with Steele’s rearguard.163

The battle of Jenkins’ Ferry occurred on April 30, 1864, amidst a constant downpour of rain. Engineers completed construction on the India rubber pontoon bridge the previous evening, which allowed the lead elements of Steele’s army to cross the Saline River. Throughout the 30th Union forces performed a fighting withdrawal up a muddy road to cover the retreat. Steele oversaw the crossing at Jenkins’ Ferry while Brigadier General Frederick Salomon conducted the rearguard action.164

Union forces held against several Confederate attacks throughout the day. Confederate assaults by infantry were constantly bogging down in the mud and enduring withering fire from the Federal forces. Confederate artillery was brought up along with another infantry division in order to break the stubborn Union defense. The combination of artillery and infantry proved more effective, with some Confederate soldiers approaching within forty yards of the Union line. In response, Saloman threw in his reserve force which included the Second Kansas Colored Regiment.165

The next Confederate assault met stiff resistance from the bolstered Union lines. Accompanying the attack were three Confederate guns. These guns positioned themselves merely two hundred yards away and prepared to fire canister. Col. Samuel Crawford, commanding Second Kansas Colored Regiment, received permission to advance and attempt to dislodge the guns. Accompanied by the Twenty-Ninth Iowa, the Second Kansas assaulted the

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cannons with fixed bayonets and shouting “Remember Poison Spring!” The attack killed and wounded several of the horses and forced the infantry to retreat. Nearly 150 Rebel soldiers were killed or mortally wounded during the attack. Losing the horses and infantry support, the Confederate artillerymen attempted to surrender to the Federal soldiers. In the aftermath of the attack, both Union and Confederate soldiers reported seeing Second Kansas infantrymen indiscriminately killing wounded and surrendering Confederate soldiers.166

The carnage inflicted upon the Confederate artillerymen resulted from the Confederate treatment of the First Kansas at Poison Springs. When the Second Kansas learned of the massacre in Camden, Col. Crawford informed the officers “that in the future the regiment would take no prisoners so long as Rebels continued to murder our men.”167 Col. Crawford later wrote that “in passing the battery the bayonet was freely used” and warned a captured Confederate officer that the continued mistreatment of black soldiers by his government would be returned in kind toward their own soldiers. That officer, Lt. John O. Lockhart, later stated that after capture he witnessed three soldiers “killed by negroes after they had surrendered.”168

The killing of Confederate soldiers by black Union soldiers featured prominently in a few post-war writings. Samuel Crawford writes about his unit’s attack on the cannons in his book, *Kansas in the Sixties*, and provides Joseph T. Wilson recollections for his work, *The Black Phalanx*. Writing to Joseph Wilson in 1885, Crawford states “that they [Confederates] had set the precedent.”169 Wilson provided a footnote to Crawford’s comment and elaborated on the conversation between Crawford and the captured Rebel officer. Crawford explained the order

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for no quarter as retaliation to the treatment received by First Kansas at Poison Springs, taking
the position that the responsibility lay with Confederate forces to stop the killing of wounded or
captured Union soldiers. Wilson ends the footnote by pointing out that despite “the kindness
shown to their prisoners, so soon as our command left, a Texas soldier…killed, in the hospital,
nine of the wounded men belonging to the 2nd Kansas Colored Infantry.”170 Both works were
published nearly thirty years after the war, during a period that saw dramatic increases in Civil
War writings by survivors and historians.

By the Twentieth Century, however, very little reference was made of the Second
Kansas’s treatment of the Confederate artillerymen. Ira Don Richards, who wrote several
articles about the campaign in the 1950s and 1960s for the Arkansas Historical Quarterly, never
mentions the attack on the artillery in his article, “The Battle of Jenkins’ Ferry.” William D.
Baker’s account for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, published sometime after 1992,
described the Second Kansas’ capture of the guns as a case of mistaken identity. “Capt. S. T.
Ruffner’s Missouri Battery,” according to Baker, “mistook the Kansans for a Confederate unit.”
Baker makes no mention of the killing of southern soldiers.171

The historiography of the campaign emphasized the futility of Steele’s advance into
Louisiana, reflecting the larger interpretation of the entire Red River Campaign as a waste of
manpower and money with very little to show at the end.172 In Arkansas, the narrative stressed
the battle of Poison Springs as the turning point of the campaign while Jenkins’ Ferry served as
the culmination of a bloody campaign and the return of the status quo in Arkansas. Steele’s

3-16; Baker, Camden Expedition, 23.
172 Ludwell Johnson’s work on the Red River Campaign established the original scholarly argument that politics and
cotton profits motivated Union military efforts in Louisiana, while establishing that the Red River Campaign
attained little of value for the Union war effort. Ludwell Johnson, The Red River Campaign: Politics and Cotton in
the Civil War (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1958).
army returned to Little Rock during the first week of May and Union forces remained in control
of the northern half of Arkansas for the remainder of the war. The role of race during the
Camden Expedition has received very little attention from scholars, at least until the 1990s.  

Public commemoration occurred at each site in the early Twentieth Century. Both
Jenkins’ Ferry and Poison Springs were memorialized by the United Daughters of the
Confederacy (UDC) in the late 1920s and early 1930s. These ceremonies, which included the
dedication of markers, occurred after the heyday of Confederate remembrance that saw UDC-
funded monuments erected across the South around the turn of the century. The location of the
battlefields in sparsely populated south-central Arkansas, as well as poor roads contributed to the
delay in commemoration. The establishment of these two markers in the late 1920s, however,
illustrated the adaptability of the Arkansas UDC toward incorporating new technology and ideas.
The historical connection between both sites as part of the Camden Expedition, along with the
rising importance of automobiles in American society, created an idea toward auto tourism
within the minds of leaders in the Arkansas UDC which led to both monuments being
purposefully placed near newly constructed roads. That idea will later influence the
development of both sites as state parks.

Memorialization first occurred at Jenkins’ Ferry. In 1928, local Masons from Lodges in
Leola and Sheridan bought land that encompassed the historical ferry crossing. That same year,
the United Daughter’s of the Confederacy erected a five foot monument near the ferry crossing,
accessible by a newly built road and nearby bridge.  

Erected in the memory of the soldiers of the Confederacy, who gave their lives for the
cause at the Battle of Jenkins’ Ferry, April 30, 1864, dedicated September 19, 1928 by

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173 Many innovative interpretations on Civil War Arkansas appeared in the 1990s, with race, gender, and religion
receiving more attention than before. A great example is a collection of essays edited by Mark Christ, Rugged and
Sublime: The Civil War in Arkansas (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994).
174 Mudpuppy & Waterdog, Jenkins Ferry Battlefield Preservation Plan, 77.
the James F. Fagan and Jenkins Ferry Chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. We honor their valor and sacrifice.  

Dora Sifford, a member of the UDC and resident of Camden, Arkansas, attended the Jenkins’ Ferry monument dedication in 1928. It inspired her to organize and create a monument in honor of the Battle of Poison Springs. Unveiled by Mrs. Sifford on September 7, 1930, the Poison Springs monument received ample coverage in the Camden News. The ceremony opened with music by the Camden Boys Band and an invocation. A local quartet sang “Tenting on the Old Camp Ground,” while “an airplane dropped an emblem of the Confederacy draped (sic) with Confederate flags upon the monument.” A Camden attorney, W. R. Thrasher, and the historian of the Arkansas division of the UDC, Mrs. C. S. Lathrop, gave short speeches. Lathrop’s speech was reprinted in its entirety in the September 12 edition of the *Camden News*. Lathrop expressed hope that the event would bring greater acclaim to the Poison Springs battlefield, which she considered “as one of the major battles fought in Arkansas.” After complementing Mrs. Sifford on her dedication to the project, Lathrop discussed the recent development of “marking historic spots with metal tablets” along certain highways in Virginia and how such markers “are arranged to tell consecutive stories.” She concludes this observation by reminding the audience that “Arkansas has many places worthy to be located and marked for remembrance” and warning the audience that “the people who disregarded and forgo the patriotic martyrs will soon fail to have heroes to honor and remember.”

Following the speeches, Mrs. Sifford unveiled a simple monument with the following inscription:

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175 Text on monument, photo in author’s collection.
The ceremony at Poison Springs offers a unique snapshot of the traditional Lost Cause rituals adapted with emerging technology. The flyover by an airplane surely offered an exciting moment for many rural Arkansans. The discussion of roadside markers in Virginia by Lathrop alludes to the rising importance of the automobile within American society. The circular route of the Camden Expedition lends itself easily to automobile tours. The Arkansas UDC, as mentioned by Lathrop, appears to be considering the possibilities of historical education through auto tours as early as 1930. Furthermore, the location of the monument points toward the use of automobiles as a means in which to further educate the public. The UDC monument originally was placed about eight miles west of Camden “where the road to Poison Springs [present day highway 76] joins the main highway [present day highway 24].” Unlike Jenkins’ Ferry’s marker, which was placed near the location of the Civil War era ferry site, the Poison Springs monument was placed nearly three miles from the battlefield. That distinction was not clearly identified on the UDC monument, but was clarified on another monument erected nearby. A few years later, the state of Arkansas placed a monument across from the UDC monument as part of the Arkansas Statehood Centennial celebrated in 1936. The monument was inscribed with the following information:

177 Photograph in author’s collection. It should also be noted that the year on the monument and the actual date of dedication are different. Several secondary sources cite the monument’s date of 1929 when describing the dedication ceremony. This is refuted directly by articles published in the Camden News on September 8 and September 12, 1930. A reason for the discrepancy in the monument’s date and the actual dedication has not been uncovered.
Ouachita County, Poison Springs Battlefield. The Poison Springs Battle Ground, less than three miles westward, was the scene of an important action contributing to the retreat of the Federal army under General Steele from Camden and south Arkansas to Little Rock. A surprise attack by the Confederates, April 18, 1864, caused serious loss to the northern forces in men, needed food supplies, and live stock, with only slight loss to the southern forces. It immediately preceded the very bloody battle at Jenkin’s Ferry on the Saline River.

The inscription also includes the authors of the monument, “1836 Arkansas Centennial Comm, Arkansas History Comm 1936,” and the monument’s identification number, “D No 8 2.” This was one of several monuments erected throughout the state in the 1930s to celebrate one hundred years of Arkansas history.\footnote{178 Inscription on monument, located in Poison Spring State Park. Photograph in author’s collection.}

Noticeable on the state centennial monument is a detailed explanation of the battle in comparison to the simple UDC monument. The monument places the battle within the context of the larger Camden Expedition. The monument depicts the accepted narrative of Poison Springs by most white Arkansans in the 1930s, a bloody battle that resulted in heavy loss of life on the northern side and directly led to Steele’s retreat back to Little Rock. No mention is made of the racial makeup of Union and Confederate forces or the racially motivated atrocities, other than to note the disparate numbers of casualties on either side.

The centennial monument does emphasize the location of the actual battlefield, nearly three miles from the intersection. The location made the monuments highly visible for tourists traveling between Camden and Prescott. Both monuments represented the local and state commemoration of Poison Springs until the establishment of the state park in 1961.\footnote{179 “Minutes, Arkansas History Commission, March 6, 2008,” www.adptfoi.com/History/AHC/Minutes/AHC_Minutes_20080306.pdf They remained in that location until 2008, when both monuments were cleaned and moved to their present location in Poison Springs State Park.}
The recognition of both battle sites by the local communities in the late 1920s occurred with memorialization in traditional Lost Cause fashion. The lateness of these dedications, in regard to the majority of UDC led dedications which happened around the turn of the Twentieth Century, stresses the continuation of Lost Cause ideology among local whites while also highlighting the incorporation of new technology by the UDC in spreading their message. The placement of monuments alongside well traveled roads, specific allusions to auto travel, and the inclusion of airplanes in the dedication are examples of how the UDC adapted its message to new mediums in order to attain a larger audience. These ceremonies preceded the establishment of the state parks by nearly thirty years, yet offer continuity to the creation of both state parks as primarily roadside stops. Furthermore, the notion of auto touring the Camden Expedition was later adopted and implemented in various ways by the Arkansas State Parks during the 1990s and 2000s.
Figure 12: Jenkins’ Ferry UDC monument. Photograph in author’s collection.

Figure 13: Poison Springs UDC monument. *Camden News*, September 12, 1930.
OUACHITA COUNTY
POISON SPRINGS BATTLEFIELD

THE POISON SPRINGS BATTLE GROUND,
LESS THAN THREE MILES WESTWARD,
WAS THE SCENE OF AN IMPORTANT
ACTION CONTRIBUTING TO THE RETREAT
OF THE FEDERAL ARMY UNDER GENERAL
STEELE FROM CAMDEN AND SOUTH
ARKANSAS TO LITTLE ROCK. A SURPRISE
ATTACK BY THE CONFEDERATES,
APRIL 18, 1864, CAUSED SERIOUS LOSS TO
THE NORTHERN FORCES IN MEN, NEEDED
FOOD SUPPLIES, AND LIVE STOCK, WITH
ONLY SLIGHT LOSS TO THE SOUTHERN
FORCES. IT IMMEDIATELY PRECEDED THE
VERY BLOODY BATTLE AT JENKINS
FERRY ON THE SALINE RIVER.

1836 ARKANSAS CENTENNIAL COMM
ARKANSAS HISTORY COMM 1936

Figure 14: State Centennial Marker at Poison Springs, 1936. *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*
http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/media-detail.aspx?mediaID=6126
Poison Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry were established as state historic sites during the Civil War Centennial. The Arkansas General Assembly first established Jenkins’ Ferry State Park with Act 10 on February 25, 1961. The Assembly later passed Act 182 to establish Poison Springs State Park on March 6, 1961. A re-classification of the Arkansas Publicity and Parks Commission in 1965 further delineated the function of each site. Individual parks were designated into four classifications: Official State Parks, State Historical Monuments, State Museums, and State Recreational Areas. The battlefields were labeled as State Historical Monuments due to “their historical value and attractiveness with respect to the history of Arkansas and of the southwest.” Besides the historical focus of the parks, another reason given was that neither park possessed the required facilities that the Publicity and Parks Commission deemed necessary to be labeled an Official State Park.180

Though created by legislation in 1961, it took many years before either park opened to the public. Poison Springs acquired its boundaries from eighty-five acres of the Poison Springs State Forest, established in 1960 and under the control of the State Forestry Commission. The new park encompassed the so-called “poison springs,” but only a portion of the larger battlefield.181 State highway 79 runs through the middle of the park, near or on the original road used by Colonel Williams’ foraging train. Park land extends to the north and south of Highway 79, and along the road westward for about one and a half miles. A fire tower, operated by the state forestry service, marks the westward boundary of Poison Springs State Park. Fighting occurred further west and east of the park boundary. The northern retreat route of Union forces

181 Several legends exist as to the origin of the Poison Spring name. Several newspapers during the 1960s purported that the name arose during the war itself, often relating it to the battle. Further investigations identified the name being in use well before the war, with most attributing it to a thirsty pioneer who drank too much water and became sick. The actual origin of the name remains a mystery. For further information see “Poison Spring State Park” entry in the Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture. http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=1250
also extends beyond the Bragg Mill Creek, which roughly marks the northern boundary of the park. Heavy fighting occurred around the present day location of the parking lot and interpretation display, between Crawford’s Arkansas Brigade and the First Kansas Infantry Regiment (Colored). The majority of the battlefield, though protected by state law, is heavily wooded and has not been developed for interpretation by the State Parks.\textsuperscript{182}

Jenkins’ Ferry, much like Poison Springs, received very little attention following its creation in 1961. The state purchased 36.35 acres around the old ferry site on the southern bank of the Saline River from the International Paper Company in 1963 and leased roughly four acres around the old ferry site on the northern bank of the Saline River from the Sheridan Masonic Lodge.\textsuperscript{183} This represents the only portion of the battlefield preserved by the state. The remainder of the Jenkins’ Ferry battleground, roughly 3000 acres, is heavily wooded and owned by a collection of individuals and timber companies. It extends southwest of the Saline River to the outskirts of present day Leola, Arkansas. It is bisected by State Highway 46, which crosses the Saline River near the historic ferry crossing and heads south toward Leola.\textsuperscript{184}

The Civil War Centennial offered small localities, like Camden and Sheridan, the opportunity to develop their historic resources with state money. The state legislature established the Arkansas Civil War Centennial Commission in 1959, with the purpose of educating the citizens of the state about its own Civil War history. State funds were made available for the establishment of markers, parks, and festivals throughout Arkansas in hopes of encouraging visitation by Arkansans, as well as tourists from outside the state.\textsuperscript{185}

\textsuperscript{184} Mudpuppy & Waterdog, \textit{Jenkins’ Ferry Battlefield Preservation Plan}, 64-67.
The potential for tourism revenue drove the development of both sites. David Pryor, the state representative from Camden, wrote the legislation establishing the battlefield park at Poison Springs. Pryor had the full cooperation of the Camden Chamber of Commerce, and closely worked with Leroy Brock, who headed the Chamber of Commerce Committee on Tourist Development. Brock handed out brochures about Poison Springs and manned a display of artifacts and pictures outside the State Legislature in order to build support for the bill. Brock’s committee also created plans to beautify the area and provide picnic tables. A more ambitious plan included contacting the states of Missouri, Kansas, Texas, and others in order to see if any would be willing to “erect monuments similar to those at Vicksburg.”

Jenkins’ Ferry provoked similar plans in Grant County. Ernie Deane, in his newspaper column, “The Arkansas Traveler,” lauded the state’s approval of Representative W. R. Stephens’ bill to establish a state park at Jenkins’ Ferry. A five member committee from the Sheridan Chamber of Commerce proposed the purchasing of more land for the park and the establishment of “a museum and other tangible reminders of the fight.” Another article in the *Arkansas Democrat* described opening of the park as one of the Chamber of Commerce’s “top projects” with the anticipation that the “Civil War Centennial will provide them [Sheridan] ample impetus to get the long-sought project moving in the right directions.” The paving of Highway 46, as one of the consequences of the parks’ establishment, also appealed to the Chamber of Commerce.

Construction at both parks continued slowly over the next few years. Poison Springs initially received permission to build picnic tables, rest rooms, and camp sites. Rampley Construction, out of Camden, won the contract with its bid of $4,765 for the work in 1962. Construction, however, was not completed until after the centennial of the battle in April, 1964.

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The park contained “six picnic tables, six fireplaces, curbing for the spring, monuments, two pumps, a $1400 fence around the springs, and three double-rest rooms” at the dedication on October 31, 1964. The Ouachita County Historical Society organized a program for the dedication around the unveiling of the Arkansas Civil War Centennial Commission marker. Other festivities included “a treasure hunt, a barbecue and a mock battle.”\(^{188}\)

For the next decade, the State Civil War Centennial Marker remained the only interpretation of the Battle of Poison Springs at the park site. In less than one hundred words, the marker accounts the number of Union and Confederate forces and casualties. The federal loss of the battle “helped to hasten Steele’s retreat to his base in Little Rock” provides visitors with an understanding of the significance of the battle. Beyond these basic facts, however, no other interpretative display existed at the park until the mid-1970s.

The public’s use of the park quickly became more recreational during the late 1960s, shifting away from a focus on historical tourism anticipated by the boosters of the park. By the 1970s, state officials lamented the lack of interpretation and were eager to make “Poison Springs a historical site rather than a recreation area.”\footnote{William E. Henderson to L.E. Surles and John L. Ferguson, Aug. 30, 1971. Poison Spring State Park File, Ark. State Parks Office – Executive Director’s Office.} Officials from the Arkansas State Parks recommended an interpretative display be constricted with “a diorama (sic) depicting the Battle of Poison Springs” on the north side of the Highway 76. This interpretative display was to “be surrounded by a rail fence with interpretative plaques mounted on brick pillars and covered with
a shelter with cedar shake shingles.”  The plaques would briefly detail the Red River Campaign and the context for the Battle of Poison Springs. The initial description of the battle for the interpretative plaques contained no references to the First Kansas or to the accusations of racially motivated massacre. The final description only noted the number of losses after the battle:

Federal losses were 181 killed, 97 wounded, 23 missing, 2 guns, 248 wagons and 1488 mules…..Confederate losses were 16 killed, 88 wounded, 7 missing; of the 248 wagons, the confederates left the field with 170 of them intact.  

Construction encountered funding problems in the fall of 1973. The entire project included the construction of the interpretive shelter, renovations to the day use area for hiking and picnicking, and trail maintenance around the spring. Bids were advertised in September 1973, but the project cost of $40,160 quickly outpaced the appropriated funds of $19,900. Delays in funding forced the project to be put on hold until the fall of 1976, with only the interpretative shelter, the diorama, and paving of the parking lot completed in 1974 by the A.F. Thomas Construction Company out of Camden. The diorama only gave the position of the troops during the battle and provided no further descriptions. Calls for further development at Poisons Springs continued from 1977 into the 1980s with state park officials calling for renewed efforts to maintain the spring and control erosion. Visitor impact at the site included littering, use of the spring as a dump site, and off-road vehicle damage to the ground and the spring. By the end of the decade, only the diorama, shelter, and parking lot were completed at Poison Springs. Despite continued calls for improvement, the park remained as it was in 1979 through

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the 1980s. It would only be with the interpretational shift toward a driving tour of the Camden Expedition during the late 1980s that the site received further attention.192

Like Poison Springs, Jenkins’ Ferry also faced difficulties from the beginning. Bryan Stearns, associate director of parks in 1961, identified the difficulty of establishing a battlefield park only months after the enabling legislation was passed. The purchase of the land surrounding Jenkins’ Ferry would need to wait, according to Stearns, because “we have no funds for a new state park and won’t until the omnibus bill is settled.” The purchase of the land from International Paper Company in 1963 solved this problem, but Stearns also highlighted a more considerable problem in the location of the park. Jenkins’ Ferry’s location along the Saline River is a floodplain, often inundated with water several times a year. Stearns emphasized that “the situation now is the same as it was 97 years ago – low, swampy land subject to overflow.” The environment of the Saline river bottom caused problems for the Confederate advance during the battle of Jenkins’ Ferry, with reports of “mud and water from shoe-mouth deep to half-leg deep.” Such an environment would require “some ‘real engineering’ to make the area a creditable state park.”193

The geographical realities of the Saline River bottomlands did not deter the proponents of the park, particularly the Sheridan town fathers. In 1963, the state appropriated $300,000 to the Game and Fish Commission for the development of a recreational area “in the vicinity of Leola, Cox Creek and the Jenkins’ Ferry Battleground along the Saline River.” Representative Witt Stephens of Grant County hoped that the money could “develop the park and build a fishing lake

193 Moore, “Park to Mark Battle Site,” 6A.
on Cox Creek.” Following the same pattern as Poison Springs, Jenkins’ Ferry became primarily a recreational park. The park received funding out of the 1978 budget for the placement of picnic tables, a pavilion, interpretation signage, and a boat ramp on the Saline River. Visitors used the park for recreational purposes, such as picnics, swimming, or fishing. Most of the projects were not fully finished until 1982. Until the placement of three interpretation panels in the 1990s, the 1928 UDC monument remained the only historical interpretation of the site. The cost of these projects came to $52,892.08 and represented the bulk of funding for the park until the 1990s. During the 1970s and 1980s, the site was often the victim of vandalism and remained prone to annual flooding. One example of vandalism at the park included the use of the bathroom building as a target for rifle practice. Repeated acts of this nature resulted in several cinder blocks being entirely destroyed by rifle fire. Park officials, as a result of being unable to stop the vandalism, ultimately removed the bathroom facility from the park in 1999. The damage of signs and the removal of grills and wooden posts constantly demanded attention from park authorities. Richard W. Davies, Director of the Arkansas Parks, expressed his own exasperation with the vandalism in 1983 when he wrote:

Quite frankly, we cannot, in good conscience, continue to pour state money into Jenkins’ Ferry to have things constantly destroyed by vandals. It’s a shame that an historic site, appreciated by so many Grant County residents, can be destroyed as quickly by a few uncaring souls.

The initial hopes expressed by city and state leaders for Jenkins’ Ferry far outweighed the realities of the environment, budget concerns, and tourism. The environmental realities and the

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194 “Budget Committee Okays $300,000 for Grant Project,” Arkansas Gazette (Feb. 8, 1963), 3A.
196 “Bill Saunders to Mac Balkman, May 12, 1999” in “Jenkins Ferry State Park File,” Office of the Executive Director of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism.
197 “Richard W. Davies to Kay M. Goolsby, March 9, 1983” in “Jenkins Ferry State Park File,” Office of the Executive Director of the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism.
tiny size of the park led many people to express desires for a larger park, or at least, better interpretation. The importance of the battle as the culmination of Steele’s Camden Expedition encouraged several groups within the state park service and Grant County to continue promoting the park through the 1980s and 1990s. The creation of a driving tour by the state park service in the 1990s made Jenkins’ Ferry the final stop on a historic driving tour that passed near five other state-owned historic sites. Local support of the site materialized in the organization of a Friends of Jenkins’ Ferry Battlefield group and the publication of their plan to enlarge the Jenkins’ Ferry Battlefield site in 2012. Both attempts confronted the racial aspects of the Camden Expedition and grappled with how best to interpret the role of African-American troops and the Confederate reaction at Jenkins’ Ferry.

Arkansas State Parks underwent a transformation in the 1970s, resulting in a greater emphasis on formal interpretation at both natural and historic parks. The professionalization of interpretative services and the reaffirmation of the mission of the state parks division resulted in a reexamination of how each site operated. Both Poison Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry Battlegrounds experienced a mixed result of the attempts by the state park service to revamp their interpretation. The inadequacies of both parks led park planners to shift from individual interpretation at either site and toward a combined approach to utilize both Poison Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry within a wider interpretation of the entire Red River Campaign. The development of a driving tour in the 1990s provided a solution. The establishment of the Camden Expedition National Historic Landmark in 1994, encompassing eight historic sites along Steele’s route, further contextualized both sites within the larger interpretation of the campaign. That shift, however, also elevated the role of African American soldiers during the campaign which proved a point of contention when the park service finally provided interpretative plaques at Poison
Springs in 1992. Accusations of racism by a University of Central Arkansas professor and threats of theft by a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans provided a tough test for Arkansas State Parks.

The reorientation of Arkansas State Parks occurred in the 1970s alongside a statewide push to professionalize park interpretation. The Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, in cooperation with the Department of Recreation and Park Administration, the Department of Planning, and Arkansas Polytechnic College, released the Arkansas State Parks Plan in 1973. The Parks Plan resulted from major reorganization in the state government, which included the creation of the Department of Parks and Tourism in 1971, and “aimed at upgrading the Arkansas State Parks System to one of the better ones in the Nation.”

The Parks Plan established several goals to increase the environmental, historical, and cultural education at each site, while also encouraging more activities for visitors at each site and increasing the economic opportunities available to the citizens of the state in the tourist industry. A part of the overhaul included the creation of individual park master plans and the reorganization of state parks. More importantly, these two sites received specific attention in regard to the potential for historical and natural interpretation opportunities.

The Parks Plan openly recognized the haphazard development of the State Park System in the Twentieth Century by noting:

It is apparent that Arkansas State Parks have no identifying character, as distinguished from recreation development in the National Forests or on Corps of Engineers reservoirs. State parks should complement efforts of the federal agencies, but the history of Arkansas parks has been to pattern much of its development after the efforts of others. The personality and variety of geographic regions and the statewide responsibility of the

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198 The Department of Planning, The Department of Parks and Tourism, The Department of Recreation and Park Administration, and Arkansas Polytechnic College, Arkansas State Parks Plan (Little Rock, Ark: The Department of Parks and Tourism, January, 1973), 1.
199 The Department of Planning et al., Arkansas State Parks Plan, 5-9.
200 The Department of Planning et al., Arkansas State Parks Plan, 17-18.
Department of Parks and Tourism present an opportunity to design the facilities to these areas, resulting in regional themes and a “State Park ethic.” Moreover, little attempt has been made in the past . . . to interpret and preserve the rich heritage and cultural resources found throughout the State.201

Such an explanation resembles contemporary discussion in other state park agencies throughout the country, specifically in reference to historical interpretation. State Parks during the 1970s witnessed a professionalization effort, with many agencies reassessing their institutional organization, park operations, and hiring criteria. Interpretation, both historical and natural, received more emphasis on training and skill.

The Park Plan addressed the lack of interpretation at both Jenkins’ Ferry and Poison Springs and advocated that each site needed better signage and programming. The connection to both sites, along with Mark Mill’s State Historic Monument, within the Camden Expedition resulted in the recommendation that “with proper interconnecting development to nearby historic sites, participation and appreciation can be enhanced.”202 The problem of flooding and soil erosion at Jenkins’ Ferry and the small size (six acres) of the Mark’s Mill site prevented larger interpretational programming beyond signage. Therefore the Park Plan focused more on Poison Springs with recommendations for an interpretive center, trail system, and recreated landscape of the battlefield. The planners noted that Poison Springs’ “natural features of the site…are conducive to complete the development program” and that “adequate funding…will revitalize the past heritage of the area.”203

Interpretation programming at the Arkansas parks only began during the 1970s with the goal “to develop an environment interpretative program to improve the quality of experience for

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201 The Department of Planning et al., *Arkansas State Parks Plan*, 20.
202 The Department of Planning et al., *Arkansas State Parks Plan*, 55.
203 The Department of Planning et al., *Arkansas State Parks Plan*, 59.
the park visitor.” Interpretation of the natural resources of the state followed the tenants laid out by Freeman Tilden, who wrote extensively on the art of interpretation for the National Park Service during the 1950s and 1960s. In operation for only a year by the time the Park Plan, the interpretative program only existed at four parks. The potential for educational opportunities, however, became obvious to the staff of the state parks with the Park Plan noting: “This experimental program introduced a new concept in State Park operations; the appreciation of the educational potential of State Parks and the potential of multi-purpose use of recreational properties.”

The interpretative program, in its infancy in 1973, nonetheless looked “to broaden and deepen the coverage now provided” beyond “the primarily natural history orientation…to one which encompasses geologic and social history as well.” Interpretation at historic sites received greater attention in the Park Plan than ever before in the history of Arkansas State Parks. Suggestions about the development of volunteer programs and the involvement of local historical societies and universities signified the beginning of a concerted effort on the part of the state park agency to develop an interpretive program for state historic sites.

The Park Plan also included the initial acknowledgement of a planned tourist route of the Camden Expedition, first proposed by the UDC in the 1920s, and subsequently mentioned, albeit briefly, until the 1980s. Broadly sketched out in the Park Plan, this idea would nonetheless emerge over the next few decades as the prominent interpretational program for Jenkins’ Ferry and Poison Springs. Though not as grand as first imagined in 1973 (there is no visitor center at Poison Springs), the adoption of the driving route program provided the impetus for the type of

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204 The Department of Planning et al., Arkansas State Parks Plan, 103.
205 The Department of Planning et al., Arkansas State Parks Plan, 104.
206 The Department of Planning et al., Arkansas State Parks Plan, 105.
historical interpretation developed at both sites during the 1990s: static interpretative exhibits and signage.

An emphasis on automobile tourism officially appeared in the 1981 *Arkansas State Parks Plan*, with the recommendation that Jenkins’ Ferry and Poison Springs “should be interpreted through an auto tour system.”\(^\text{207}\) Other parks, such as Old Washington, Crater of Diamonds, and Millwood State Parks, would also be included along the auto tour as either stops or nearby recreational venues. The State Parks estimated a budget of $32,890 for the fiscal year of 1984-1985 to cover the placement of historical markers, exhibits, and trail guides.\(^\text{208}\)

The creation of this driving tour, “Red River Campaign in Arkansas,” began immediately under the direction of Jay Miller in the late 1970s. Miller, the Parks Planner for the Arkansas State Parks, guided this project through to its completion in 1989. One of the first mentions of the idea within the state park offices appears in a response from John Ferguson, the state historian, on July 20, 1979. Ferguson approved of the driving tour, but balked at Miller’s proposal of “asking county historical societies to ante up money for historical markers when the Parks Division has never faced up to its own responsibilities in historical interpretation.” Ferguson acknowledges some of the work done at Poison Springs in recent years, but adds that “to my knowledge the Parks Division has never done anything at any of these sites except maybe dig a latrine and build a picnic table.”\(^\text{209}\)

Ferguson’s blunt response adequately summed up the situation at both Poison Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry up to that point. Arkansas State Parks solved the problem by hiring Dr. Michael B. Dougan, a professor at Arkansas State University, to write a comprehensive historical


narrative as the basis for the proposed automobile driving tour. Dr. Michael B. Dougan prepared a report entitled, “General Steele’s Advance to Camden, 1864” on August 1, 1980. Dougan’s contract stipulated that he “specifically…address the 1864 Red River Campaign mounted by General Frederick Steele” and “a number of research efforts associated with the…battle at Poison Springs.” Dougan’s contract included other requirements, such as delineating the route of Steele and highlighting any other points of interest along the way. For his services, Arkansas State University released Dougan for the contract period of the month of August, 1980 and he received $950 in compensation for his work.210 Dougan’s expertise on the Civil War, and the recent publication of his book *Confederate Arkansas*, made him an excellent choice to write the narrative.

Following the completion of Dougan’s research, Jay Miller and Anne Guthrie finished a proposal for the Red River Campaign Trail. A joint review of the project by Miller and Guthrie concluded in the spring of 1982. Along with marking a driving tour between Camden, Poison Springs, and Jenkins’ Ferry, the committee suggested widening the scope of the tour in regard to other historical sites and natural parks in the area. While the focus of the tour would be on historic sites, the developers were keenly aware of the potential advertisement of nearby natural parks such as White Oak Lake, Lake Catherine, Degray, Crater of Diamonds, Logoly, and Moro Bay. The review committee argued that the potential of “a well marked, mapped driving tour . . . on our south Arkansas historic parks is tremendous.”211

Miller and Guthrie outlined the driving tour as a circular route through south central Arkansas, with the visitor starting and ending in Little Rock. The route paralleled Steele’s march

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and included stops at Poison Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry. The driving tour would also take
visitors near other sites that were not state parks, but played important roles in Steele’s
Campaign through south-central Arkansas. These included several river crossings, Confederate
Governor Harris Flaniagan’s house and law office, and the battlefields of Elkin’s Ferry and
Praire De Ann. Dougan included twenty-six potential stops for the auto tour, including Poison
Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry. The route began by heading south east out of Little Rock to
Prescott, then south west toward Camden, before turning back north east toward Little Rock.
The entire journey covers approximately 250 miles and can be driven in just over five hours
without stops.212

Despite Jenkins’ Ferry’s role as the largest and final battle of the campaign, Poison
Springs emerged as the focal point for the driving tour according to Guthrie and Miller. Both
cite the location of the battlefield as the prime reason to further develop the site, since it is close
to the city of “Camden, near another tourist site (White Oak Lake park), and fairly close to the
interstate.”213 Though not mentioned, the regular flooding of Jenkins’ Ferry Battleground State
Park and its smaller size are other possible reasons why Poison Springs received more attention.
Both Guthrie and Miller claimed that Poison Springs Battleground State Park “is central to the
development of an overall interpretation of Steele’s campaign.”214

The interpretative planners concluded the proposal with an estimated budget of materials
and advertisement. Two of the big items included in the budget were the creation of interpretive
signage and brochures. Guthrie and Miller estimated that at least thirty interpretive signs would
need to be created and placed along the route. Likewise, at least 20,000 brochures were
requested as guides for visitors. The cost of signage, at $550 per sign, came to $16,500.

212 Jay Miller and Anne Guthrie to Gregg Butts et al., April 2, 1982, 2.
213 Jay Miller and Anne Guthrie to Gregg Butts et al., April 2, 1982, 4.
214 Jay Miller and Anne Guthrie to Gregg Butts et al., April 2, 1982, 4.
Brochures, at fifty-two cents each, would cost a total of $10,350. Miller proposed offsetting the high price tag through the direct sale of brochures to those counties containing portions of the Red River Campaign Trail. Estimating at least ten counties buying 1,000 brochures each, Miller proposed selling them at a discount of $1.25 each. The remaining 10,000 brochures would then be sold to the public at $2.50 each. Total sales under this plan would amount to $37,500, with a profit margin of $27,150 after factoring in the cost of brochure development and printing. As such, the total estimated cost of the project would be $30,550 with the profits from brochure sales negating $27,150 of that total.215

The Red River Campaign Trail proposal went out to the Director of Arkansas State Parks, Richard W. Davies, on April 2, 1982. Just five days later Davies responded to the proposal in a handwritten note. Applauding the idea, Davies agreed that the driving trail could “make a big splash for very little,” but then noted that it would be difficult to get funding since “it’s definitely not something on the verge of being lost…and that will impact on ‘priority.’” Davies also did not share Miller’s optimism about turning a profit on the sale of brochures, adding that “we’d be waiting a long time for that.”216 The subsequent development of the Red River Campaign driving tour lent credence to Davies’ concerns about priority. The program languished through most of the 1980s, with the driving tour brochure only finalized in 1989 with only five out the proposed twenty-six sites mentioned.217

Miller and Guthrie presented a proposal to completely overhaul interpretation at both Jenkins’ Ferry and Poison Springs through the implementation of a driving tour, one that would

215 Jay Miller and Anne Guthrie to Gregg Butts et al., April 2, 1982, 3.
217 Jay S. Miller and Elwin Goolsby, “The Red River Campaign in Arkansas,” (Little Rock: Arkansas State Parks, 1989). Very little evidence was uncovered as to why the driving tour took nearly a decade to complete. Jay Miller commented that “in those days state parks was always strapped for funds and three Red River Campaign sites under our care were small day use areas that received little attention and less funding.” Email from Jay Miller to author, January 7, 2016.
bring about new frictions. Miller emphatically stated his reason in a response to the criticism from Richard W. Davies by arguing that “these parks – their purpose and statewide significance – has been lost” and that only through the development of a linked interpretative plan can these sites “be made to have meaning and continuity.”\(^{218}\) The driving tour clarified the context of each site within the larger framework of the Camden Expedition and represented the culmination of an idea that stretched all the way back to Mrs. C. S. Lathrop’s comments during the dedication of the Poison Springs monument in 1930. Under this plan, Arkansas State Parks proceeded to update signage at Poison Springs and develop that site as the focus of the Camden Expedition. Undertaking this project meant an acknowledgement of a massacre at Poison Springs became inevitable.

The Red River Campaign driving tour reiterated the role of Poison Springs as the turning point of the Camden Expedition. Further development by Arkansas State Parks at the site followed the introduction of the driving campaign. The historic marker and diorama, installed in 1974, remained the only interpretative signage at the site. A 1991 report by the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program noted that “the interpretative quality of this diorama is limited however because of apparent vandalism” and that other signage “would improve the interpretative quality of the site.”\(^{219}\) New interpretative panels were designed that year by Arkansas State Parks Exhibit Shop, with the consultation of the Civil War Round Table of Arkansas, to be placed within the already existing pavilion. Six metal panels would replace the diorama and offer a more detailed narrative of the battle, along with maps and graphics.

\(^{218}\) Miller to Davies, April 8, 1982. Poison Spring State Park File, Ark. State Parks Office – Executive Director’s Office.

The new panels were unveiled at a dedication ceremony on April 18, 1992. Superintendent Ron Salley led the ceremony and introduced each of the five speakers. State Parks Director Greg Butts discussed the agency’s role in historic preservation. Local historians, Townshend Mosley and Charles Walthall presented talks on the battle and the Red River Campaign. Dr. Gregory Urwin focused on the First Kansas Colored Infantry in his speech. Finally, Ronnie Nichols expanded on Urwin’s topic by speaking on the USCT regiments during the Civil War. Several reenactor groups from around the state were on hand to perform firing demonstrations and participate in the dedication ceremony. This event precipitated a controversy about the interpretative panels at Poison Springs for the next several years. The dispute would
encompass several recriminations by various individuals claiming racism, cowardice, and incompetence on the part of Arkansas State Parks. As a result, the interpretive panels would be dismantled and redesigned over the next two years.\textsuperscript{220}

The purported massacre of African American troops during the battle proved to be at the heart of the dispute. The newly installed exhibit detailed the Red River Campaign and the Battle of Poison Springs in six aluminum panels. Panel Five described the high casualties received by the First Kansas Colored and laid responsibility on the Second Indian Brigade, comprised mostly of Choctaws. Two explanations were given to substantiate the forty-nine percent casualty rate of the black troops. Following the description that the Choctaws were responsible, the panel states: “The First Kansas had treated the Indians in the same brutal manner at an engagement a year earlier at Honey Springs in what is now Oklahoma.”\textsuperscript{221} The panel narrative offered the customary interpretation of the battle’s aftermath, with subdued references made to earlier interpretations about the savagery of Native Americans. The next sentence elaborated on the context of the Red River Campaign to substantiate the high casualty rate and provided the second explanation:

The death toll among the Federal black troops was compounded by Confederate outrage at the treatment of area women by Federal foragers and by the collection of “unscrupulous other plunder” not appropriate for supporting an army.\textsuperscript{222}

The second paragraph reflected older narratives about the reported abuses of Federal troops during the campaign and how Confederate soldiers inflicted retribution as a form of justice against these crimes. The racist tones of those earlier interpretations, however, are not included in Panel Five’s narrative. Nonetheless, the narrative provoked a response from one of

\textsuperscript{220} “Poison Spring State Park Exhibit Dedication, April 18, 1992,” Personal files of Gregory J.W. Urwin.
\textsuperscript{222} Miller to Butts, July 9, 1993.
the speakers at the dedication in 1992, leading to the replacement of Panel Five and a resulting controversy.

Considering the subject of Dr. Gregory J. W. Urwin’s speech on April 18, 1992, it was no surprise that he took on the main role of challenging the Panel Five’s narrative, as well as the responsibility for changing its substance over the next year. Urwin’s presentation during the dedication, “Tribute to the First Kansas Colored Volunteers,” drastically differed in tone and substance with the state park’s interpretation. Stating that Civil War parks “are imperfect tools for the remembrance of military history,” Urwin juxtaposes the peaceful serenity of a quiet wood or field with the authenticity of a Civil War battlefield by suggesting the audience “pay a visit to a slaughterhouse or a meat processing plant” in order to gain a better understanding.223 Urwin states emphatically that this analogy is especially apt at Poison Springs, “the site of the most infamous war crime in Arkansas history.”224 He recounted the forgotten role of African American soldiers, enduring racism in the service and on the battlefield, in order to achieve freedom for themselves and their families. Urwin particularly stressed the consequences of black soldiers fighting against Confederate soldiers who, “incensed at the idea of men they had long considered docile inferiors bearing arms against their former masters, refused to treat Negro prisoners according to the rules of war, murdering them or sending them back into slavery.”225

Whereas the park interpretation avoided the role race played in the massacre, Urwin presented a brief history of the African American soldier during the Civil War through the experiences of the First Kansas Colored Volunteers. Urwin praised the Arkansas State Parks for creating a “handsome exhibit…as a signpost on our continuing journey to a new South, a better

and fairer society.” But it is apparent also that he perceived the new exhibit as a turning point in the interpretation of the battle when he states: “We not only commemorate an episode from our common heritage—we are performing an act of justice.” That praise would be retracted by Urwin just a week later.226

It is unclear if Urwin knew how different his comments were compared to the panel’s narrative during the dedication. His official opinion entered the record a week after the dedication. On April 24, 1992, Urwin responded to Assistant Superintendent Becky Cahoone’s letter of thanks sent the day after the dedication. Urwin briefly thanks her for all the help during the dedication before proclaiming: “If I had been given a chance to preview the text of the new Poison Springs exhibit, however, I sincerely doubt I would have participated in your ceremony.” He goes on to lambast the exhibit as “a piece of garbage—an example of history distorted to please the sensibilities of white racists” and “a collection of falsehoods.” He further claims that the exhibit “is an insult to the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers and all African-Americans in Arkansas and across the nation.” Needless to say, Urwin’s shift of opinion on the exhibit occurred quickly and took the state park agency by surprise.227

The source of the misunderstanding appears in Urwin’s letter of April 24, when he exclaims that he understood “that the new exhibit would conform to the Department of Parks and Tourism report on Poison Springs battlefield.”228 Urwin received that report on December 3, 1991, along with an invitation to speak at the April 18 dedication. The report, compiled by the Arkansas Park Service from notes and research conducted by Michael Dougan, provided an overview of the battle. It mentioned openly the killing of wounded black soldiers by Confederates, both white and Choctaw soldiers. The material contained specific examples of

228 Urwin to Cahoone, April 24, 1992.
cruelty by Confederate soldiers, drawn from participant’s letters and a contemporary newspaper, *The Washington Telegraph.*

Urwin called the report “a fine piece of research” that “deals quite honestly with the Poison Springs Massacre.”

Urwin’s surprise at the contents of the exhibit stemmed from the stark difference of interpretation between it and the report. The blame, at least in Urwin’s mind, resided with the Department of Parks and Tourism and the outside authors of the exhibit. The panels were created by the Arkansas State Parks exhibit shop, but the Civil War Roundtable of Arkansas provided the initial narrative in November, 1991. Urwin chastised the Parks Department for “entrust[ing] such a delicate assignment to a group of amateur Civil War buffs—when there are at least half a dozen widely published and nationally renowned professional Civil War historians employed by Arkansas universities.” He goes on to compare the Roundtable to professional historians as “asking candy-stripers to perform a dangerous operation instead of brain surgeons.”

The exhibit team edited much of the narrative in order to fit the limited space of the panels and to provide clarity, but largely remained faithful to the Roundtable’s original account.

Urwin’s accusations were taken very seriously by the Arkansas State Parks and reconsideration of the wording on Panel Five continued throughout the next year. Urwin, working alongside Jay Miller, reviewed the language and proposed new additions during the summer of 1992. Upon review of documents sent by Urwin, Miller agreed in October to replace the panel with the following description of the massacre:

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229 Becky Cahoone to Gregory J.W. Urwin, December 3, 1991. Personal Files of Gregory J.W. Urwin. This letter contained seven pages of the Dougan document, along with a handwritten note from Becky Cahoone that it only includes the section on Poison Spring.

230 Urwin to Cahoone, April 24, 1992.

231 Urwin to Cahoone, April 24, 1992.

The First Kansas Colored suffered 49 percent casualties, compounded by what Confederate General Marmaduke called “the uncontrolled Indians” plus, many black soldiers were killed rather than taken prisoner.233

Miller supported Urwin’s goal of accurately portraying the history, but cautioned Urwin to remember that “there’s not room for many details, nor is a wayside exhibit panel an appropriate medium for great detail.” Instead Miller suggested that “to entice the visitor,” there should made available “documentation at White Oak Lake State Park and…the Camden Library, and if available, have reasonably priced publications on sale at the park.” Miller continued by expressing his wish for the staff at these sites to be better prepared to answer questions from the public.234

Urwin, however, still felt that the revised panel did not go far enough in explaining the larger role of white supremacy in allowing the massacre to occur. “Once again, a racial minority is slandered and white complicity in the Poison Springs Massacre is covered up or excused,” wrote Urwin. He dismantled the new narrative by highlighting the role of white troops at Poison Springs, in particular the Twenty-Ninth Texas which “were heard to crow as they moved around the fallen blacks, slaughtering the wounded: ‘Where is the First Nigger now? All cut to pieces and gone to hell by bad management.” Confederate leadership did not escape condemnation either with Urwin suggesting that a lack of control over “the uncontrolled Indians” does not remove “an obligation to see that the rules of war were observed.” Explaining that “we are dealing with some ugly incidents in an ugly war, and the only way to handle them is with utter candor,” Urwin proposed his own revision for the new panel:

The First Kansas Colored suffered 49 percent casualties, largely because their foes refused to take black prisoners and even murdered wounded men lying on the field. The Second Kansas Colored Infantry, the other black regiment in Steele’s Union army, responded to the Posion(sic) Springs Massacre by adopting a no prisoners policy. The

234 Miller to Urwin, October 21, 1992.
Second fulfilled that dreadful resolve at Jenkins’ Ferry on April 30, where it overran an enemy battery, killing 150 Rebels and sparing only one man to tell the tale.235

According to Urwin, “in this version there are no good guys or bad guys – just men brutalized by war.” It also highlighted consequences of the Battle of Poison Springs within the Camden Expedition, specifically the impetus for the no quarter policy of the Second Kansas Colored at Jenkins’ Ferry. The revision connected the individual roadside parks within the historical context of the Red River Campaign, which was an important theme for the driving tour created by Jay Miller. In a letter to State Parks Director Greg Butts, Miller urged a quick resolution to the issue and supported Urwin’s changes “because it moved from Poison Springs to an example from Jenkin’s Ferry, and in doing so demonstrated the effects of fear and rage on both sides.”236

Both Urwin and Miller gained a victory of sorts in challenging the original narrative of Panel Five. Urwin advanced the interpretation that race played an important role in the treatment of African-American troops at Poison Springs and that fact, though unsettling to many, should be presented to the public. Miller received an interpretation that strengthened his stated goal for the newly created driving tour. Urwin’s proposed wording received confirmation and the Park Service planned on replacing Panel Five in the spring of 1993. The panel had not been installed by the time of the anniversary of the battle. During this event, Urwin again spoke about the First Kansas Colored Regiment to an estimated crowd of 300 people. The reaction to Urwin’s presentation and the missing panel resulted in a backlash by the public.237

For the 129th anniversary of the Battle of Poison Springs, Dr. Gregory J. W. Urwin prepared a speech entitled, “Reflections on the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers and the Poison

Springs Massacre.” He used much of the previous year’s presentation, but greatly expanded on
the aftermath of the battle. A copy of his talk at the 1992 anniversary contained barely eight
pages of writing, whereas the 1993 speech contained seventeen pages. Nearly half of that
focused on the massacre of black troops at Poison Springs and the subsequent retaliation of the
Second Kansas Colored at Jenkins’ Ferry. Urwin included several sources from both
Confederate and Union participants, as well as newspaper accounts, battle reports, private letters,
and the work of Civil War historian Bell Irvin Wiley. Urwin argued that the massacre happened
because “the North’s use of black troops undermined the very notion of white supremacy that
undergirded the traditional Southern way of life.” He dismissed the older interpretation by
accusing Confederate leaders of trying “to absolve themselves and their troops of any blame for
the massacre by attributing all the atrocities to Maxey’s Choctaws.” Stating that “it would also
be a disservice to the truth,” Urwin also went into detail about how the Second Kansas Colored
Volunteer resolved to take no prisoners and committed another atrocity at Jenkins’ Ferry,
attacking an artillery position “with shouts of ‘Remember Poison Spring!’”

Urwin’s focus on the massacre in 1993 corresponded directly with the previous year’s
discussions between Urwin, Miller, and others at Arkansas State Parks. It reflected the
challenge, initiated by Urwin, to alter how the state park service interpreted the role of race
within the Camden Expedition and the larger scope of the Civil War. That focus gained larger
credence beyond academic professionals during the late 1980s and early 1990s. For example,
the Academy Award winning film Glory, in which Urwin participated as a reenactor, helped to
promote African Americans as active participants in their own struggle to gain freedom. The
increased focus on slavery, race, and black soldiers directly confronted the silence of those topics

238 Gregory J.W. Urwin, “Reflections on the First Kansas Colored Volunteers and the Poison Spring Massacre,”
in the Lost Cause. Urwin’s discussion of the massacre and its immediate consequences at Jenkins’ Ferry directly refuted older interpretations and reflected current scholarship, as well as promoted the state park agency’s goal of expanding the awareness of each site’s relation to the other within the Camden Expedition.

Initial accounts of the 1993 anniversary event at Poison Springs seemed positive. Approximately three hundred people attended the program, which by one account “exceeded last year by 40 or 50 percent.”239 The new panel had yet to be installed and no one mentioned its absence to park staff on a day filled with speeches, activities, and reenactments. The following day, however, an unidentified man called Greg Butts’s and Jay Miller’s offices in Little Rock to complain about the missing panel. He also called Assistant Superintendent Becky Cahoone to complain. According to Cahoone, “…this gentleman became upset when he heard the panel was to be replaced and wanted to object.” During a second phone call that morning to Cahoone, the person demanded to know the language of the first panel and told her “that he had filed an injunction to stop the replacement of the panel and had contacted Senator [W. D.] Moore of El Dorado and the Governor’s Office.”240

No record exists of any legal action taken to halt the installation of Panel Five, but there are later clues as to the identity of the person in the files of the Arkansas State Parks. Parks Director Butts wrote to a Bill Thompson of El Dorado on June 3, 1993, concerning the “process by which we updated the exhibits at Poison Springs.” No records of Thompson’s initial contact with Butts have been uncovered, but his residence in El Dorado and the contents of the letter

point toward Thompson being the possible identity of the upset gentleman mentioned in the memos on April 19.241

Butts provided Thompson with a concise timeline, starting with the construction of the pavilion at Poison Springs Battlefield State Park in 1975 through the establishment of the driving tour in 1989, before addressing the exhibit panels. Calling the battleground “a commemorative site,” Butts argued that new panels were one of the ways the park service tried “to inform the public of the significance of this battle.” He then briefly described the development and alteration of Panel Five while also listing the several individuals involved, including Townshend Mosely, Dr. Michael Dugan, Dr. Gregory J. W. Urwin, and Edwin Bearss. Butts defended the decision to change two paragraphs on Panel Five because “the encounter with the First Kansas Colored Infantry was an important part of this battle” while adding that it “is presented as only one facet of the six-panel interpretation of the battle and the Red River Campaign.”242

Butts’ tone throughout the letter is that of someone answering allegations of revisionism. He used the phrase “factual information” three times in the letter while writing about the alteration of Panel Five. Furthermore he explicitly notes that all the changes were “based on documentation” and concluded that “our purpose is to provide factual information that represents all sides to history – the revision does just that.” He also mentioned the initial contribution made by the Civil War Roundtable of Arkansas, thereby assuring Thompson that multiple individuals were responsible for the changes to the interpretation panel.243

Charles Walthall, a local historian and participant in the 1992 dedication ceremony, disagreed with Butt’s reply to Thompson in a letter to Butts on June 11. Walthall provided a list

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242 Butts to Thompson, June 3, 1993.
243 Butts to Thompson, June 3, 1993.
of discrepancies between the original panel and the Urwin-written revision. Walthall labeled the
treatment of the First Kansas by Confederate soldiers as acceptable because they “were under
congressional orders to show no quarter.” In contrast, Walthall described “the resolve of the
Second Kansas to commit war crimes at Jenkins Ferry.” Walthall called the act “a fact” and
included the official report of the Confederate battery commander as evidence.244

Walthall included several veiled threats that might occur if the original panel was not
returned. He warned that by “eliminating the reference to the Choctaws and the massacre at
Honey Springs,” the state park service could possibly lose some financial contributions from the
Choctaw Nation. Walthall ended his letter by warning Butts that “if the plaque contains
information which is inaccurate, I sincerely doubt that it will remain up for any length of time.”
Walthall supported this threat by stating: “Racial relations have not yet reached a point in south
Arkansas as to view the new plaque with any degree of tolerance.”245

Greg Butts responded less than a week later to defend the revisions and answer some of
Walthall’s complaints. Much like the letter to Thompson, Butt’s defended the revisions as a
chance to further inform the public about the battle and “to establish the relationship of this battle
with the Red River Campaign.” Butts then addressed Walthall’s specific complaints. Butt’s
justified the inclusion of the word “murder” to describe the actions of Confederate soldiers at
Poison Springs because it appeared in historical reports and records. As for the actions of
Second Kansas, Butts argues that the term “war crimes” does not appear anywhere on the panel
to describe any one unit’s actions. Furthermore, the Second Kansas’ “dreadful resolve’ is noted
to demonstrate the emotions of war and that atrocities were committed by both sides.” Butts
directly addresses Walthall’s threat by stating: “Let me remind you that these exhibit panels are

Executive Director’s Office.
245 Walthall to Butts, June 11, 1993.
state property and it is a violation of state law to damage or steal state property. If damage or theft occurs, the offender will be prosecuted.”

Further negative reaction to the April 18 program appeared in a letter to Jim Cannon, the Regional Director of the Department of Parks and Tourism. Mrs. E. W. Hooper, Jr. wrote to Cannon on April 22, 1993 to express her opinion that “many of us felt Mr. Urwin’s 30 minute read speech was inappropriate” and that his talk on “the great war crimes to the Black union (sic) soldiers was too much.” Mrs. Hooper feared that the presentation “does NOT promote good will, rather it could inflame some blacks to justify rioting and crimes against whites” and did not want a video of the speech “presented in large crowds of youth looking for an excuse to bring harm to others.” Hooper reminded Cannon that no one living in 1993 had anything to do with the massacre and questioned the factual information on slavery presented by Urwin, adding that most Arkansans fought for states’ rights. Jim Cannon responded to Mrs. Hooper’s letter on May 6 and agreed with her that “Dr. Urwin’s description was a little more vivid in places.” He assured her that he would review the event with both Ron Salley and Becky Cahoone in the upcoming days.

Butts’ response to Thompson and Walthall recognized the difficult nature inherent within interpretation at Poison Springs, and to a lesser extent, Jenkins’ Ferry. The challenges raised by Urwin after the 1992 ceremony represented a larger push among scholars to include the realities of slavery and race in the interpretation of the Civil War. Thompson and Walthall’s response to Urwin’s challenge, likewise, corresponded with other adherents to the older interpretations that shied away from controversial subjects like slavery and race. The appropriate role of Arkansas

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State Parks within the debate appeared muddled, but Miller and Butts’ responses leaned toward a frank and factual revision of the Camden Expedition. Unfortunately, neither of the men were the final arbiters on how these battlefields were to be interpreted.

On June 17 and 18, 1993, the State Parks, Recreation, and Travel Commission held their quarterly meeting and discussed a resolution to the controversy at Poison Springs Battlefield State Park. The commission, appointed by the Governor, oversaw the Department of Parks and Tourism and was comprised of fourteen members with an equal number from all four of Arkansas’s congressional districts. Richard Davies, the Executive Director of the Department of Parks and Tourism, was also present at the meeting. Charles Walthall addressed the board in support of the original panel, which in his opinion “paid tribute to African Americans, Indians, and women.” He also repeated his claim that Confederate soldiers were under “orders to take no prisoners, [and] therefore…forced to kill.” Greg Butts countered that Urwin’s revisions were “derived from official records and Mr. Walthall’s information was not made available to the Department during the revision of the plaque.”

The Commissioners debated the merits of both arguments briefly. Richard Davies commented “that the Parks Division is caught between two historians’ viewpoints,” leading Commissioner Joe Harris to “suggest that the plaque note that there are differences and either provide both sides of the story or refer visitors to other sources for further information.” After discussing the issue, the Commission decided that the revision should be further examined by

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Parks Division staff, Dr. Gregory Urwin, and Charles Walthall. After that the panel would be revised again to reflect the mutually agreed upon narrative.  

Following nearly two years of work, the Poison Springs exhibit remained incomplete. Walthall’s appearance before the State Parks, Recreation, and Travel Commission effectively halted the implementation of Urwin’s revised narrative. Several reasons possibly exist for why the Commission ordered a third version of Panel Five. Walthall presented himself to the Commission as a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, perhaps implying that his opinion of the exhibit was not his alone. A brief statement in the notes also indicated some caution on the part of Commissioners to fully commit to just one interpretation: “Perceptions of war reflect differences, however, the Department is trying to be fair.” Fairness meant the inclusion of both interpretations on the panel in order to allow the visitor to make up their own mind.  

The committee’s decision echoed the growing debate between education and commemoration that increasingly confronted historic sites in the 1990s. The emergence of identity politics, perhaps best encapsulated in the term “culture wars,” became ever more present within American society and informed growing debates on a variety of political and social issues. Within the field of history, the culture wars described a conflict between a celebratory or critical understanding of the past. Poison Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry were established in the early Twentieth Century as commemorative sites that celebrated the defeat of Steele’s army by Confederate forces. The SCV became the organizational descendants of the UDC during the 1990s, with members like Walthall dedicated to preserving the Lost Cause interpretation of the war. Scholarship countered these older narratives by increasingly focusing on the social issues...

of the war, such as slavery and race. Urwin’s attempt at revising the older narrative at Poison Springs represented a renewed attempt at critically understanding the issues of the war.

Arkansas State Parks, however, were answerable to both men as well as to other members of the public. Such a responsibility leads state park agencies to be more reactive to criticism, but not necessarily shy away from controversial subjects. The final revision of Panel Five represented a mutual effort on part of Arkansas State Parks to appease critics, while also maintaining the focus on the First Kansas’ experiences at Poison Springs.

Not everyone was willing to compromise. Dr. Urwin sent a hotly worded letter to Greg Butts on June 29, upon hearing about the committee’s decision “to renege on its promise to replace the racist exhibit…with one that is historically accurate and objective.” He accused the state of relenting under “the complaints and threats of a few crackpots.” Urwin focused on Charles Walthall as the main instigator, calling him “an amateur, whose work is so shoddy he can only get it published by a vanity press” and lamented that apparently the Park Service preferred his opinion to that of “a proven, widely published historian of national reputation.” Urwin concluded his letter with a request for all letters received by the department about Poison Springs and for all internal memos. He explained that “if it takes media exposure and political pressure to get the department to do the right thing, then I am prepared to go that route.”

Greg Butts responded on July 6, reminding Urwin that the committee refused Walthall’s initial request to return the original panel and that the new panel would receive confirmation from both him and Walthall. Butts provided a strong defense for his department’s handling of all criticism directed toward the new exhibit, including the complaints received about Urwin’s presentation on April 19:

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Indeed, it is our responsibility to check out and respond to inquiries, just as I am doing in this situation. That’s not hassling, that’s doing our job. Just as you had the right to make a presentation at Poison Spring, the visitors who listened to your speech also have a right to express their views. And we have the responsibility of listening to everyone’s view – a point you have seemed to overlook. Visitors expressing their opinions have nothing to do with academic freedom, professionalism or scholarship.252

The public’s role in commemoration at Poison Springs and Jenkins’ Ferry exerted itself again in the 1990s, as it had previously done in the early Twentieth Century with the erection of memorials and in the 1960s with the inclusion of the sites within the state park service. In this instance, however, the park service recognized that the older interpretations were no longer palatable to a sizeable part of the public. Greg Butts noted in his letter to Dr. Urwin that along with refusing Walthall’s request for the return of the original panel, the state parks agency also defended the new panel against both Thompson and Walthall’s critiques. Only now, under orders from the SPRT Commission, did state parks review Urwin’s changes to the panel. Even that change, however, was only possible after “staff meet with Mr. Walthall and you to determine if any changes are warranted.”253

The subsequent revision of Panel Five, tasked by the Commission in June, began immediately. Jay Miller discussed the revision with Walthall by phone on July 7 and personally met with Urwin on July 8. All three collectively agreed to drop references to Jenkins’ Ferry and the context of the Second Kansas’ decision to take no prisoners, while leaving in language that attributed race as the cause for the Poison Springs Massacre. They also agreed to shift focus back toward the men themselves and included a quote from their commanding officer, Col. James M. Williams. The third and final revision stated:

Due to their reputation for fierce fighting, Colonel Williams positioned the First Kansas Colored Infantry to guard the Union train against the heaviest Confederate onslaught.

253 Butts to Urwin, July 6, 1993.
They successfully repulsed two enemy attacks, but with heavy losses. Denied reinforcements, they gave way on the third attack. The First Kansas suffered a high proportion of dead to wounded: 117 killed, 65 wounded, largely because the Confederates took no African-American prisoners.

“The conduct of all the troops…was characterized by true soldierly bearing, and in no case was a line broken except by an overwhelming force, and then falling back only when so ordered. The gallant dead…all [displayed] the most heroic spirit, and died the death of true soldiers.”

Report of Colonel James M. Williams, First Kansas Colored Infantry

Although all agreed on the revision, at least one participant urged further elaboration and only reluctantly approved it. Records indicate that most of the revision occurred on July 8 and 9, with Ron Salley, Dr. Urwin, and Bill Thompson agreeing on the third revision. Charles Walthall, however, called Jay Miller back on July 8 to push a completely different version. Walthall’s suggestion, titled “Old Foes Meet…,” specifically discussed the history between the First Kansas Colored and the Twenty-Ninth Texas by recalling their early combat against one another at Honey Springs in 1863. Walthall wrote the new version to fit the word count of the old one and even emphasized how “the words are evenly split with only one more Confederate word than Union word.” Miller noted in his report, however, that Walthall removed any mention of race and instead argued that the massacre resulted from the enmity between both units where “the 1st Kansas preferred death to surrender.” Miller took the suggestion, but urged Walthall to relent after explaining that the panel no longer mentioned Jenkins’ Ferry. Miller noted, “I read him the Urwin revised text…, and after discussion, Charles agreed that was better than the Jenkin’s Ferry one and…would agree if I would show you his effort here.” Miller followed his promise and included Walthall’s write up in the report to Butts.²⁵⁴

Approval forms for the third revision were sent out on July 9 to several interested parties, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope for official approval signatures to be mailed back.

no later than July 14. Urwin responded to his on July 12, noting that “although I consider it an unnecessary (albeit minor) retreat on the part of the Department of Parks and Tourism, I can live with your text revision of Panel #5 as it still acknowledges that black soldiers were massacred at the Battle of Poison Spring.”255 Official announcements, indicating that the final panel would be installed by October 1, were sent out on July 27 to Ron Salley, Townshend Mosely, Gregory Urwin, Bill Thompson, and Charles Walthall. Following some minor grammar edits, the panel arrived in the fall of 1993 and remains at Poison Springs Battleground State Park.256

The debate over interpretation during the early 1990s indicated the growing role of race within Civil War interpretation at historic sites across the country. Public challenges of older interpretations signified a shift toward a more diverse narrative at historic sites. Complicating the Lost Cause interpretation of the Camden Expedition provided park officials with the opportunity to reach new audiences, but also presented a threat to others. Following the changes at Poison Springs in the early 1990s, further attempts were not successful to improve upon the interpretation at Poison Springs or for similar signage at Jenkins’ Ferry.

The difficulty of changing the traditional interpretation at Poison Springs undoubtedly led to the Arkansas Park Service examining its interpretative approach in other parks. Jenkins’ Ferry State Park remained unchanged following the Poison Springs controversy, because of funding and the unwillingness on the part of the Park Service to push a new interpretation even further. The limited space at Jenkins’ Ferry and seasonal flooding also added reasons to not alter any exhibits. Instead the older exhibit panels at Jenkins’ Ferry were replaced in the early 1990s with

similar, but newer signs. The three panels broadly cover the establishment of the park in 1961, the battle, and a description of the Saline River Bottoms. There is no mention of African American troops or the revenge killings by the Second Kansas.257

Figure 17: First Interpretative Panel at Jenkins’ Ferry. Photograph in author’s collection.

257 Mudpuppy & Waterdog, Jenkins’ Ferry Battlefield Preservation Plan, 115. See Figures seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen for the three panels at Jenkins’ Ferry.
Figure 18: Second Interpretative Panel at Jenkins’ Ferry. Photograph in author’s collection.

Figure 19: Third Interpretative Panel at Jenkins’ Ferry. Photograph in author’s collection.
That did not stop park officials from trying to improve the site. The small size of the park became the biggest hurdle. Jay Miller advocated that the state attempt to purchase or lease an additional 1,500 acres of the battlefield in a 2005 proposal. In cooperation with the Civil War Preservation Trust, the purchase of more battlefield property would allow state parks to broaden the interpretation at the battlefield beyond the forty acre site at the crossing of the Saline River. This proposal failed to receive any funding and was rejected.258

Private efforts to expand the battlefield also occurred in the 2000s. The Friends of Jenkins’ Ferry Battlefield, organized in 2010, released a “Battlefield Preservation Plan” in 2013. Mudpuppy & Waterdog, Inc. prepared the plan for the group with funding provided by the American Battlefield Protection Program. The plan called for the preservation of over 8,700 acres, all owned by private individuals, and the creation of interpretative programs through hiking and driving trails. No evidence exists of any land being purchased on behalf of the Friends Group or Civil War Preservation Trust. The Friends of Jenkins’ Ferry Battlefield appears defunct as of 2016.259

The inability of the park service to expand its holdings at Jenkins’ Ferry Battlefield State Park is evident in Richard Davies’s response to the Jenkins’ Ferry Battlefield Preservation Plan in 2013. Davies commended the group for the detailed preservation plan, but quickly dispelled any notion of them achieving their goal. Davies cited the average price of battlefield land as $3,750 per acre and concluded that the purchase cost for the 3,597 acres deemed high priority by the planners would surpass “$13.5 million for land acquisition alone.” The location of the battlefield property among heavily wooded land prevented the state from competing against the

timber industry. Jenkins’ Ferry State Park still consists of the original forty acres at the present time.\textsuperscript{260}

The interpretation changes made by Arkansas State Parks at both historic sites are mixed in retrospect. The successful challenge to the older narrative of Poison Springs is somewhat limited when compared to the broad interpretation at Jenkins’ Ferry. In addition, the small size and lack of employees also hindered the interpretational impact. Static signage is the only option at both sites, unless further funding appears in the future. Nevertheless, the inclusion of both parks in the 1990s as part of a driving tour and the promotion of Poison Springs State Park as the turning point of the Camden Expedition did expose a new narrative to the public.

The inclusion of the story about the First Kansas at Poison Springs also raised the larger issue of race in Civil War combat, further complicating the traditional narrative of the Camden Expedition. The expanded role of black soldiers at Poison Springs was quite evident during the sesquicentennial in 2014. The massacre interpretation appeared throughout the week long commemoration, such as in the \textit{Camden News}, the living history exhibits around Camden, and at the battle reenactment on April 19, 2014. The Ouachita County Civil War Sesquicentennial Committee Chairman James Lee Silliman reaffirmed this narrative during his remarks at the closing ceremony: “It is our hope that the fruits of our efforts this week would be to further educate our children about the 1st Kansas Colored Regiment and the sacrifices they made for this country.”\textsuperscript{261}

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CHAPTER IV: FORT PILLOW

Fort Pillow remains one of the most controversial battles of the Civil War and its establishment as a battlefield park reflects this. Created as a Tennessee State Park in 1971, the contentious debate over the battle directly influenced the large interval that separated the battle from any formal commemoration of the site. Once established as a state park, however, the debate did not go away. Unlike the previous three sites examined, Fort Pillow did not contain an established commemorative tradition or historical marker. Nevertheless, the state of Tennessee initially planned to create a historic site with the traditional Lost Cause narrative emphasizing the martial duty of Confederate soldiers and the military skill of Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest. Meanwhile, a different interpretation of the battle based upon the site’s importance to African American history appeared during the National Historic Landmark dedication in 1975.262 Initially envisioned along the lines of other southern battlefield state parks, this incident proved that Fort Pillow could not ignore the legacy of the massacre in post-Civil Rights America. Some employees within the state park service, such as Dr. Robert Mainfort, later challenged the traditional narrative while creating the park’s audiovisual program. Mainfort cited current scholarship and sought out other historians to better interpret the battle and its aftermath. The conflict over interpretation at Fort Pillow State Park reflected earlier debates about the battle and highlighted the continued avoidance of some white southerners to acknowledge the role of race.

during the Civil War. During its first ten years, Fort Pillow State Park experienced interpretational challenges created by the consequences of the Civil Rights Movement and the growing professionalization of the state park service. Though the traditional narrative ultimately achieved dominance at Fort Pillow, the establishment of the park during this changing time ensured that park planners could no longer ignore the massacre.

Any discussion about the interpretation of the Battle of Fort Pillow must begin with the battle and subsequent investigation by the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. The battle occurred on April 12, 1864 and resulted in a Confederate victory. Allegations of Confederate brutality toward the black soldiers garrisoning the fort very quickly came to the attention of the North and resulted in the first ever visit by members of the Joint Committee to the western theatre. Their report, released on May 5, 1864, became part of the propaganda used to bolster Northern resolve during the spring and summer campaigns. The Committee’s report became the primary source for nearly all Northern interpretations of the battle published during and after the war. Post-war southern narratives emphasized the political nature of the report and dismissed most of the accusations as propaganda.\(^{263}\)

Both northern and southern narratives do agree on most facts up to the battle’s aftermath. Fort Pillow sits atop the First Chickasaw Bluff overlooking the Mississippi River and is located forty-five river miles north of Memphis. Constructed by the Confederates in 1861, the fort was abandoned in 1862 when Union forces occupied Memphis. For the next two years, Union troops garrisoned the fort, patrolling the Mississippi River and fighting Confederate guerrillas. By February 1864, Southern Unionists, organized as the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry and

commanded by Major William Bradford, occupied the garrison. The Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry drew recruits from the surrounding counties, and were joined on February 21 by elements of the 2nd U.S. Colored Light Artillery (USCLA), a unit comprised of escaped slaves. The garrison was strengthened in late March by the First Battalion of the Sixth U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery (USCHA.), under the command of Major Lionel Booth. Major Booth, a combat veteran, took overall command of the fort.264

General Forrest’s spring raid of 1864, undertaken to resupply horses, supplies, and recruits, ranged as far north as Paducah, Kentucky. Forrest returned south through West Tennessee after a defeat at Paducah. Commanding a force of fifteen hundred men, Forrest approached Fort Pillow from the east and attacked on April 12, 1864. Nearly six hundred soldiers were present in the garrison, with half being black troops. General Forrest spent the morning and part of the afternoon positioning his troops around the fort. Sharpshooters were placed around the fort and kept up a brisk fire to keep the garrison from escaping. Major Booth was killed early in the morning by one of these sharpshooters and leaving Major Bradford in command. Forrest ordered a ceasefire around 2:00pm and issued an ultimatum of surrender to the garrison. Major Bradford refused the ultimatum. Forrest launched a general assault around 4:00 pm. Confederate troops overran the fort from three sides, forcing the Union troops down the bluff and towards the river. The assault lasted roughly forty five minutes.265

The resulting Union casualties of the battle are the initial cause for the Congressional investigation by the Joint Committee. The initial Union reports made about the battle all agree that some form of massacre took place during the battle. Acting Master William Ferguson reported witnessing the battle from his steamship Silver Cloud and the aftermath of collecting the

wounded and the dead. Ferguson reported “Bodies with gaping wounds, some bayoneted through the eyes, some with skulls beaten through, others with hideous wounds as if their bowels had been ripped open with bowie-knives, plainly told that but little quarter was shown to our troops.” Further searching for the dead and wounded proved to Ferguson that “here there were unmistakable evidences of a massacre . . . with cold-blooded barbarity and perseverance which nothing can palliate.” Ferguson estimates about five hundred and fifty soldiers in the garrison, with at least three hundred killed in the battle.266

Reports of the brutal aftermath at Fort Pillow soon spread across the county. The naval escorts, including the *New Era*, *Platte Valley*, and the *Silver Cloud*, arranged a truce for collection of the dead on the day after the battle. Reporters interviewed the survivors upon the return of the ships to Cairo, Illinois. The *New York Times* labeled the battle “The Fort Pillow Massacre” in brief articles on April 18 and 20, 1864. *Harper’s Weekly* wrote that “the rebels commenced an indiscriminate butchery of the whites and blacks, included in the wounded” in what they described as an “inhuman, fiendish butchery . . . perpetrated by the representatives of the ‘superior civilization’ of the States in rebellion.”267

The Joint Committee responded to the public outcry by passing a Resolution on April 18 to send U. S. Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio and U. S. Representative Daniel Gooch of Massachusetts “to inquire into the truth of the rumored slaughter of the Union troops, after their surrender, at the recent attack of the rebel forces upon Fort Pillow.” Leaving on April 19, the men, along with a stenographer, traveled to Cairo and Mound City, Illinois; Columbus, Kentucky; and Fort Pillow and Memphis. Interviewing over seventy witnesses, many wounded


survivors of the battle, the investigators concluded “that the atrocities committed at Fort Pillow were not the result of passions excited by the heat of conflict, but were the results of a policy deliberately decided upon and unhesitatingly announced.” Also interviewed were naval officers present at the battle and the day after, as well as civilian participants.\textsuperscript{268}

Instructed to investigate only the Fort Pillow incident, the congressmen went further and included other battles during Forrest’s spring raid. These incidents, at Paducah, Kentucky on March 25 and at Columbus on April 13, were included due to the similarities between them and the battle of Fort Pillow. Both battles involved colored Union troops and the severe ultimatums issued by the Confederates. At Paducah the Union commander was informed by Forrest that “if I have to storm your works you may expect no quarter,” while at Columbus a division commander under Forrest, General Abraham Buford, claimed that if he were to capture the city, “no quarter whatever should be shown to the negro troops whatever.”\textsuperscript{269} At Fort Pillow a similar ultimatum was delivered to Major Bradford, with Forrest concluding his request for surrender by stating: “Should my demand be refused, I cannot be responsible for the fate of your command.”\textsuperscript{270} The inclusion of these incidents, specifically the similarities between the ultimatums at Paducah, Columbus, and Fort Pillow, allowed the congressmen to emphasize that Fort Pillow was not an aberration, but instead a fulfillment of these threats.

The Confederate attack at Fort Pillow was described as being successful only because of deceit and in violation of the rules of warfare. While negotiating the surrender under a flag of truce, “the rebels were moving down the ravine and taking positions from which the more readily to charge upon the fort.”\textsuperscript{271} Evidence of this violation is given in the testimony of Captain James

\textsuperscript{269} \textit{Congressional Report}, 2-3; \textit{Official Records}, ser. 1, 32: 571.
\textsuperscript{270} \textit{Official Record}, ser. 1, 32: 596.
\textsuperscript{271} \textit{Congressional Report}, 4.
Marshall, commander of the *New Era* gunboat that was stationed offshore from the fort during the battle. Witnessing the Confederates violating the truce by moving their troops forward, “he refrained from firing upon the rebels . . . for fear that, should they finally succeed in capturing the fort, they would justify any atrocities they might commit by saying that they were in retaliation for his firing while the flag of truce was flying.” Depicting the Confederate capture of the fort as a result of trickery negated any blame on Union forces for not stopping the assault, and also added to the culpability of the Confederates for the resulting massacre.

The depiction of the battle itself is brief in the report, with the emphasis on the Confederate intent to massacre the Union troops. Quoted as shouting, “No Quarter” and “kill the damned niggers; shoot them down,” Confederate troops quickly overran the fort and proceeded to murder surrendering white and black soldiers. Using theatrical language, the report described the “indiscriminate slaughter” of the garrison, with “men, women, and even children…deliberately shot.” Specific incidents from the testimonies, particularly gruesome or brutal actions, received specific attention. One such action was the deliberate burning of the hospital tents containing Union wounded by the Confederates. It was noted that “even some of those thus seeking to escape the flames were met by those ruffians and brutally shot down, or had their brains beaten out.” As if this was not cruel enough, one of the wounded soldiers was reportedly crucified to a wall, and “then the building was set on fire and burned.” Reference was also made to some wounded soldiers being buried alive by the Confederates. The report concludes its description of the massacre by stating that between “300 to 400 are known to have been killed,” while “300 were murdered in cold blood after . . . our men had thrown down their arms and ceased to offer resistance.”

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Emphasizing the previous threats used at Columbus and Paducah, the deception of the Confederates during the truce, and the brutality of the battle’s aftermath allowed the committee to shape the report toward propaganda purposes. In its description of the event, comparisons of the Confederates as inhumane and deliberate in their actions are constantly repeated. The aftermath of the battle was described as “a scene of cruelty and murder without parallel in civilized warfare, which needed but the tomahawk and the scalping-knife to exceed the worst atrocities ever committed by savages.” Furthermore these actions indicated that “it is the intention of the rebel authorities not to recognize the officers and men of our colored regiments as entitled to the treatment accorded by all civilized nations to prisoners of war.”

The official report was only seven pages long, but included over one hundred pages of testimonies from surviving members of the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry, the Sixth USCHA, and Second USCLA. Following its release on May 5, nearly 60,000 copies were printed for distribution in the North, with an advanced copy of the report appearing in the May 6 edition of the New York Times. Publicized in the North as a “massacre,” the report was used as propaganda to bolster Northern resolve during the spring and summer of 1864. The final report and testimonies, combined with a similar report on the treatment of Union prisoners of war in Confederate camps, depicted accounts of depravity and barbarity by Confederate soldiers. Released at the same time as Grant and Sherman were beginning their summer offensives in Virginia and Georgia, the allegations made against the Confederates presented a powerful justification for continuing the war.

The report, released barely a month after the battle, added to the notoriety already associated with the battle. The cry of “Remember Fort Pillow” was heard on many battlefields.

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274 Congressional Report, 4.
275 Congressional Report, 2.
276 Tap, Over Lincoln’s Shoulder, 205-6.
during the rest of the war, especially when African American troops were involved. The motto was first used at the battle of Brice’s Crossroads which occurred in nearby Mississippi less than a month after Fort Pillow. Black soldiers now had a rallying cry against Confederate forces and a strong precedent to avoid surrender.277

The publicity and subsequent investigation made Fort Pillow the most well known, and most documented, atrocity site of the Civil War. The promptness of the Congressional investigation provided many examples of fresh testimony for scholars to examine, while the political motivation of the committee has led southern apologists to question the entire report. Later accounts of the battle and its aftermath can be summarized as either confirming or criticizing the Congressional investigation. Post-war northern and African American interpretations liberally used the report to explain the battle as a racially motivated massacre. Post-war southern interpretations highlighted the inconsistencies and contradictions of the testimonies, as well as commenting on the propaganda uses of the report. That inflexible, sectional view toward Fort Pillow reappeared during the formation of Fort Pillow State Park.

The battle remained controversial throughout Reconstruction, but as sectional reunion took hold it faded into the background of northern memory. This enabled the southern narrative to assert itself, and become by the turn of the twentieth century the acceptable interpretation of the battle. While the southern account became the dominant one, it constantly had to defend against the lingering northern version as well as the evidence for massacre found in the accounts of the Congressional Investigation. Post war southern writers interpreted the battle as a victory for the South and emphasized the military genius of General Forrest, with the victory at Fort Pillow portrayed as the culmination of his spring 1864 raid. Several different explanations defended Confederate forces in these southern interpretations. For example, the writers routinely

277 Cimprich, *Fort Pillow*, 106.
labeled the northern interpretation of a massacre as propaganda, with the exaggerated casualty numbers and atrocity testimony. Seeking to reaffirm the inferiority of black troops some southern writers, such as Thomas Jordan, John P. Pryor, and John A. Wyeth, commented on the presence of alcohol in the fort, leading credence to the allegations that the Union forces were drunk during the attack and therefore unable to properly follow orders to surrender. Emphasis on the presence of alcohol also referenced widely held racial stereotypes of blacks, specifically drawing attention to their unsuitability as soldiers and explaining the high number of causalities at Fort Pillow. Later southern writers avoided racist assumptions and defended the high casualty rate by pointing to the limited training received by the Union troops. Above all, accusations that General Forrest ordered or allowed the massacre to occur were vehemently denied. The majority of these writers even deny a massacre occurred, often pointing to other bloodier battles during the war.278

Only in the past forty years did scholarship turn toward the massacre interpretation at Fort Pillow, starting with Albert Castel’s article in 1958 and continuing through to the present. Perhaps the best monograph on the battle is John Cimprich’s, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory*. This book and an earlier article with Robert C. Mainfort Jr. remain the best scholarly analysis on the battle and its aftermath. By the 1970s, the Fort Pillow massacre achieved wide acceptance among scholars, although the traditional narrative remained accepted by most outside of academia.279


Both Mainfort and Cimprich provide the most in depth analysis on the casualty figures and support the argument that a massacre occurred immediately following the Confederate seizure of the fort. They calculated “that of the 585 to 605 men present on April 12, 1864, between 277 and 297 Federals, 47-49 percent of the garrison, were killed or mortally wounded” during the battle.280 Furthermore, both scholars established that “black troops suffered a casualty rate nearly double that of their white” counterpoints, with nearly 195 black soldiers killed out of the 305 black soldiers serving at the fort. Confederate reports stated that 202 Union soldiers were captured at Fort Pillow, with only 51 reported as black soldiers. Cimprich and Mainfort provided additional support for their argument of a massacre by including several other sources, such as a Confederate eyewitness, Sgt. Achilles Clark, who wrote that “the poor deluded negroes would run up to our men fall upon their knees and with uplifted arms scream for mercy but they were ordered to their feet and then shot down.”281

280 Cimprich and Mainfort discovered that Bradford’s Thirteenth Cavalry received recruits between the end of March and the battle on April 12. A complete muster roll is not available for twenty soldiers because of partial paperwork. Therefore, Cimprich and Mainfort argue that Bradford had between 277 and 297 soldiers under his command on April 12. The difference of Bradford’s men does alter the final percentages of killed. Cimprich and Mainfort, Jr., “The Fort Pillow Massacre: A Statistical Note,” 835-836.
The massacre debate and the question of responsibility extended into the establishment of Fort Pillow State Historic Park. State officials, historians, and federal government officials disagreed on key interpretational points at Fort Pillow, and the resulting park reflected those disagreements. The creation of the park represented the conflicted memories of the Civil War, particularly after the Civil Rights Movement. The struggles to integrate the African American experience into the Civil War narrative are evident throughout the interpretational process at the park. Beginning in 1970 and continuing into the early 1980s, Fort Pillow battlefield attempted to present a traditional interpretation of the battle, with a focus on the military aspects of the battle and emphasis on the military brilliance of Nathan Bedford Forrest. The site obscured the aftermath of the battle as much as possible because of it complicated the traditional narrative based upon Confederate military bravery and skill.
The development of Fort Pillow also provides a snapshot of the professional development undertaken in state park services across the country during the 1970s. The lack of any commemoration by heritage organizations provided the Tennessee Park Service with more freedom to develop the site. Park service employees played a greater role in the developing of the park’s programming, but the influence of the Lost Cause can still be seen in their dependence on specific narratives that blurred the massacre or outright denied it. Using these sources, the park developed plans for a museum, trails, and even a reproduction fort. All of the panels, exhibits, and printed information would emphasize the military aspects of the battle, while largely ignoring the social aspects. This did not go unchallenged and individuals, both outside and inside the Tennessee Park Service, tried several times during the first decade of the park’s existence to include the massacre in interpretational programs. Their limited success greatly influenced the park’s interpretation of the battle up through the sesquicentennial.

Neither Union or Confederate forces reoccupied Fort Pillow after the battle. Following the war, the bodies of Confederates and Union soldiers buried at the fort were disinterred in 1867 and moved to the National Cemetery in Memphis. The fortifications reverted back to wilderness, while the surrounding land was cultivated and farmed by local families just as it had before the war. In the 1940s, the National Park Service proposed developing a park along the banks of the Mississippi River. The Park of Discovery would cover 300,000 acres along the western Tennessee border and be dedicated to Hernando De Soto, the Spanish explorer of the Mississippi River. The project never received any funding.²⁸²

The Daughters of the American Revolution, as well as local business leaders, urged State Representative Frank Garner of Lauderdale County to introduce a park bill in the 1970 Tennessee General Assembly. The bill declared that 1242 acres surrounding the Fort Pillow site should be purchased and designated a Tennessee State Park with funding from the state and a grant of $208,175 from the United Stated Department of the Interior. The state purchased more acreage in the surrounding area, often owned by local families, over the next few years. The park grew to its present size of 1642 acres by the mid 1970s. The majority of these land purchases was located toward the western part of the park, which reflected efforts to include the entire First Chickasaw Bluff in order to complete a reproduction of the historic fort and outlying buildings.283

In preparation for the creation of the park, the Tennessee Historical Commission created a historical survey of the area. *A Survey and Narration of the First Chickasaw Bluff, Lauderdale County, Tennessee*, completed in 1974, contained the state’s historical interpretation of the area. The Survey included a complete history of the area, though the Civil War period received more emphasis. Beginning with the original inhabitants, the Chickasaws, the first chapter proceeded through the removal of the Native American tribes and into the early settlement of the area by white settlers in the 1820s. The next rest of the narrative examined the establishment of Fort Pillow by the Confederates in 1861 through the 1864 battle and its aftermath. The final section, entitled “Recommendations,” emphasized a few of the interpretational challenges that the park could face once it opened to the public.

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The Survey provided the park service with the foundation of the narrative used in the park’s interpretation. The report utilized several primary sources, such as the *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies and Navies* and the *Congressional Investigation of the Fort Pillow “Massacre.”* The Survey did consult several secondary sources, from which two of the “more outstanding . . . were John A. Wyeth’s 1898 biography of Nathan Bedford Forrest and John L. Jordan’s 1947 article on Fort Pillow, published in the Tennessee Historical Quarterly.”

The report also included Albert Castel’s 1958 article, but only cited it twice. Overall, the Survey examined a plethora of information available to scholars in the 1970s and concluded:

> An analysis of both the Northern and Southern evidence leads to the conclusion that Forrest’s troops having captured Fort Pillow as a result of superior strength and tactics, out of a combination of race hatred, personal animosity, and battle fury, then proceeded to kill a large number of the Union garrison after they had either ceased resisting or were incapable of resisting.²⁸⁵

Earlier in the report, the massacre is identified as “essentially an outburst of racial antagonism” by the Confederate troops toward the Union garrison. Included alongside the recognition of racial hatred are other reasons offered as an explanation for the massacre. The presence of Tennessee Unionists in the fort is mentioned as a cause, highlighting the belief “among Forrest’s men that the Tennessee Unionists . . . were responsible for various outrages and hardships allegedly suffered by Confederate supporters in the region.” Another reason was the battle fatigue experienced by the Confederates throughout the day and the effect that the refusal to surrender had on the southern troops. Citing “the racial, political, and personal passions of Forrest’s troops,” the report included the “bitterness of being forced to risk their lives in an assault which they deemed wholly [sic] unnecessary” to the reasons that a massacre occurred.²⁸⁶

Having concluded that there was a massacre, the *Survey* then goes into detail about the Union losses and the atrocity allegations. Using Jordan’s argument that the battle of Fort Pillow did not produce enough casualties, comparable to the other battles in the war, the report stated that “since the losses at Fort Pillow by the Union garrison are obviously neither the largest of the war percentage-wise nor numerically, the question of a ‘massacre’ then needs to be settled on exactly how these individuals met their deaths.”\(^{287}\) A listing of the atrocities cited in the *Congressional Report* followed in the *Survey*, most of which were refuted. Allegations of men buried alive are confirmed, but explained away as ruses attempted by Union soldiers in order to escape death. The allegations of soldiers nailed to walls and burned alive are deemed hearsay, with the evidence leading toward the southern version that any bodies found burnt were already dead. In conclusion, the *Survey* stated “that these barbaric offense[s] were the products of the Federals’ imagination.”\(^{288}\)

On the other hand, however, the *Survey* avoids identifying a culprit in the massacre, stating in the introduction to the chapter on the Fort Pillow controversy that “neither side in this controversy has developed a case which totally proves the burden of responsibility” and that “each side has been guilty, in varying degrees, of bias, prejudice, and error.” This statement seems to be at odds with the *Survey’s* conclusion that the massacre occurred and was caused by Confederate troops. Both sides had ulterior motives to promote or deny the massacre, but “the burden of responsibility,” at least in the report’s own conclusion, rests with the Confederate troops.\(^{289}\)

This equal distribution of blame is not unique to Fort Pillow and is present at most Civil War battlefield commemorations. The transformation of battlefields toward the glorification of

\(^{289}\) Tennessee Historical Commission, *History of First Chickasaw Bluff*, 41.
reconciliation, through equal veneration of both sides, effectively bypassed the causes of the war and any consequences left unsettled from the war. Most importantly for sectional reconciliation was the avoidance of specific responsibility or blame. In addition, the purposeful relegation of African Americans to the background of the narratives allowed for the remembrance of Confederate troops to become more acceptable within battlefield commemorations.

Commenting on the mutually acceptable themes of devotion and sacrifice toward any cause, Edward Linenthal lamented that “visitors are only occasionally reminded by patriotic rhetoric of the conveniently forgotten message of Abraham Lincoln—namely, that martial sacrifice would only take on meaning as Americans addressed the continuing tragedy of racial division.”

The Survey utilized a lot of the written information about the battle produced during the war and through the 1950s. An important note in the conclusion of the report identified many southern interpretations as merely an effort “to soften the harsh Northern reaction and the actual facts of the massacre and to exonerate the great Southern military hero, Nathan Bedford Forrest.” Castel made a similar conclusion in his work. The identification of partiality in the secondary sources, both those defending and refuting the massacre interpretation, made the Survey an invaluable resource for park exhibits and programming.

A more organized process of planning occurred at Fort Pillow State Historic Park than any of the other state battlefield parks examined so far. Tennessee State Parks directly benefited from the New Deal programs during the 1930s, specifically the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Created in 1937, the Division of State Parks, under the supervision of the Tennessee Department of Conservation, rapidly expanded because of the construction of dams and reservoirs throughout the Tennessee Valley. These projects allowed the State Parks to create

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291 Linenthal, Sacred Places, 56-57.
recreation areas and natural preserves along the newly created reservoirs. Other New Deal programs, such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Farm Security Administration, acquired over developed farmland and completed reforestation projects. These projects verified for “the state the value of planned development for recreational purposes on lands that had lost their former value.” By the 1950s, most of these federally funded areas were under the control of the state and provided a foundation for Tennessee State Parks to expand their park system.292

Tennessee State Parks expanded dramatically during the 1960s, because of federal and state legislation. The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 provided the state with the ability to conserve more land and receive matching funds from the Federal Government. The State Parks invested heavily in recreational resources, such as campgrounds, marinas, golf courses, and hiking trails throughout the park system. Additionally, the Tennessee Recreation, Planning, and Development Act of 1965 allowed State Parks to broaden the mission beyond just natural resources and assume control over cultural resources. Under that legislation, Fort Pillow became available to be developed as a State Historic Park.293

The park legislation through the 1960s greatly influenced the identity of Tennessee State Parks, particularly in their broad mission “to preserve and protect, in perpetuity, unique examples of natural, cultural, and scenic areas and provide a variety of safe, quality, outdoor experiences through a well-planned and professionally managed system of state parks.”294 The creation of Fort Pillow State Historic Park occurred at a point in which state park systems across the country were experiencing an influx of money and achieving a new level of professionalization within

the field. The completion of the *Survey* by the Tennessee Historical Commission in the fall of 1972 represented only one aspect of this new professionalism and planning within State Parks. The state immediately began crafting a *Master Plan Report: Fort Pillow State Historic Area* upon the successful passage of the park legislation in 1970. The *Master Plan* outlined the physically development of the park while the *Survey* provided “a guide for the proper development and interpretation of this significantly historical site.”

Spencer Boardman, the Program Administrator for Master Planning, oversaw the completion of the *Master Plan* in September 1975.

The *Master Plan* reflected the broad mission of Tennessee State Parks to preserve cultural and natural resources. Fort Pillow, established as a state park, received the designation of Tennessee Historic Area under the guidelines of the Tennessee Outdoor Recreation Area System (TORAS). Created in 1974, TORAS represented the first attempt by State Parks to create an all encompassing system for recreation throughout the entire state. Under the guidelines of TORAS, Fort Pillow would provide several recreational opportunities to the public by “capturing the full interpretive potential of the historic remains while strengthening the area with compatible recreational support facilities and activities.”

An emphasis on recreation may seem a contrary purpose for a battlefield, but the term is loosely defined as “to cover such a wide spectrum as to defy precise definition.” The main qualification would be “outdoor oriented” to “draw the visitor into an outdoor experience not otherwise available in an urban society.”

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295 Strickland and Huebner, *From Civil War to State Park*, 25.
activity, from whitewater rafting to visiting an outdoor historic site. The TORAS guidelines served as a plan to exert control over all state-owned parks, areas, and sites under the central management of the Department of Conservation. As stated in Chapter III of the guidelines:

The goal of the Tennessee Outdoor Recreation Area System is to preserve and protect unique examples of natural, cultural, and scenic areas and to provide to all its citizens and welcomed visitors a wide variety of quality outdoor recreational and educational experiences through a comprehensively planned and managed system of land and water areas.299

The development of Fort Pillow delineated between the areas of historic significance and those considered, in the traditional sense, as recreational. The Master Plan placed ball fields, a fishing pier, a nature museum, and campgrounds outside of the battlefield site. These recreational areas covered roughly half of the acreage for the park. The planners placed the recreational areas along the entrance to the park so “that the historical preserve or focal point be an entity in itself and not be used as a main thoroughfare to other recreational activities.” They also encouraged a reliance on professional historical state agencies by recommending the use of “the Historical Commission and State Museum in an advisory capacity” on the “restoration of the final redoubt, central muster ground, water batteries, and intermediate rifle pits complete with ordinance.”300

Conforming to the recreational guidelines of TORAS did not diminish the main purpose of Fort Pillow as a cultural resource. While the site offered many opportunities for outdoor recreation, the planners stressed that the “major focal point of Fort Pillow is its historical interpretation.”301 The design and layout of the park reflects that purpose by only allowing

299 Master Plan for Tennessee Outdoor, 87.
301 Master Plan Report: Fort Pillow, 43.
entrance to the park on the western side. Adding an entrance to the park on the east side meant creating roads and possibly “disturbing that particular area of historical significance.”

In the area marked “Historic Preserve,” the paved road terminated in a cul-de-sac at the edge of the boundary between the battlefield and the rest of the park. The interpretative center, “tucked back into the treeline [sic], just off an open grass field and almost touching the intermediate rifle pits,” marked the passage between recreational area and the historic area. Built on the edge of the battlefield, this building contained a museum and auditorium. After orientation on the battle in the museum, the visitor exited the building and “finds himself walking behind the walls of the intermediate fortifications and standing at the very spot where Brigadier General Nathan Bedford Forrest led his men to a victory.” This configuration set apart the battlefield from the rest of the park. “Visual contact can be made with the final fort or redoubt some quarter mile away” once visitor left the museum. Overgrown with trees and underbrush since the battle, The Master Plan Report called for the landscaping of the battlefield to “give the visitor a more authentic picture of how the area appeared in 1864.”

State Parks, guided by the previous decade’s legislation and building upon the professionalism of the park service, outlined the development of a battlefield park from scratch in the early 1970s. The lack of any previous commemoration at the site provided the planners with a freedom not available to the previous parks at Olustee, Poison Springs, and Jenkins’ Ferry. The Master Plan outlined a park that provided several recreational opportunities to visitors by taking advantage of both the natural and cultural resources of the area through landscape planning. The Tennessee Historical Commission’s Survey complemented the Master Report by providing a detailed overview of the history of the site to accompany the physical

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302 Master Plan Report: Fort Pillow, 43.
development of the park. The *Survey* provided an overview of the debate concerning the aftermath of the battle, with several interpretations presented in an attempt to provide a balanced history of the site. Implementation of the interpretative programming, however, would prove to be more difficult than first outlined in the *Master Report*. Park planners ignored the controversial nature of the massacre interpretation in favor of the traditional narrative through the creation of the trails, museum exhibits, and park publications.
Figure 21. Land Use Study Map. Notice the demarcation between the battlefield (Historic Preserve) and the recreational spheres of the park. Tennessee Department of Conservation, *Master Plan Report: Fort Pillow*, 27.
Several trails guided visitors through the battle and were among one of the first improvements created for the park. Along with the creation of the physical trails, the park also created a trail map to guide visitors through the historic battle. A company, Historical Hiking Trails, Inc., designed a map of the park that included numbered positions and historical information. The battle unfolded along the trail as the visitor walked from the interpretation center to the main fort, and back. The information provided on the map and at the interpretation points is strictly military in nature. The source of the trail map came from a pamphlet produced by Edward F. Williams, III. The State Representative for the Ninety-Sixth District (Memphis) and a Civil War scholar, Williams edited *Confederate Victories at Fort Pillow* which provided “preparatory reading material for hikers on the Fort Pillow Trail.” The pamphlet contained a compilation of secondary sources by Thomas Jordan and J. P. Pryor, who wrote the first biography of General Forrest in 1868. Williams argued that the 1868 biography provided the best interpretation because Jordan and Pryor corresponded with Forrest, exclaiming that “Forrest himself has provided us with an authentic account of the recapture of Fort Pillow” and claimed it “to be the revelation of Forrest’s own story.” Both the trails, map, and pamphlet were available by 1974, even before the park had officially opened. The trail map continues to be used by the park to the present.\(^{304}\)

Figure 22. Fort Pillow Trail Map, part 1.
Figure 23. Fort Pillow Trail Map, part 2.
The hiking guide, along with the planned landscaping, created a traditional Civil War battlefield park. A strict focus on military action removed the possibilities for any discussion about the racial dimensions of the battle. The use of mainly southern interpretations of the battle made it even easier to remain “historically” accurate, since all of them discredited the massacre or provided elaborate defenses for its occurrence. *The Master Plan Report* hoped that the planned landscape would “entice the visitor to become involved in the historical interpretation through” the recreation of the final redoubt and the preservation of the existing trenches.\(^{305}\) Emphasizing only the military operations during the battle and limiting the information on the aftermath of the battle presented Fort Pillow along the same lines as other battlefield parks throughout the country.

The emerging professional nature of park planning and interpretation, however, meant that containing the massacre interpretation would not be very easy. The *Master Plan* outlined the state’s policy of developing historic sites only after being placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The guidelines for how the State Parks preserved historic sites unintentionally allowed outside organizations to provide different interpretations about Fort Pillow’s significance. This recognition would initiate the first open debate over interpretation at Fort Pillow State Historic Park only two months following the release of the *Master Report* in 1975.

Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, Fort Pillow achieved elevation to National Historic Landmark status in 1974.\(^{306}\) That honor denotes a site that possesses “preeminent national historical importance” and must be specifically nominated by the Secretary of the Interior.\(^{307}\) Applicants awarded the status of a National Historic Landmark

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\(^{305}\) *Master Plan Report: Fort Pillow*, 7.

\(^{306}\) “Interior Secretary Names Fort Pillow One of 13 National Landmark Areas,” *The Lauderdale County Enterprise*, September 27, 1974.

“agree to preserve…the historical integrity of this important part of the national cultural heritage” and “to continue to use the property only for purposes consistent with its historical character.” The designation also provided the Federal government an opportunity to influence the narrative of the site by explicitly stating in the application the significance of the site. Unlike the state of Tennessee, the Federal government overwhelmingly focused on the aftermath of the battle and its impact on racial relations within the nation.

National recognition of Fort Pillow occurred because of the changing political and social climate in the nation, primarily due to the successes gained in the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s. In 1971, the National Park Service sought to rectify the lack of black historic sites throughout the nation. The job of selecting the new sites was contracted out to the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, because the NPS Historic Sites Survey office contained no black professionals on staff. The Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation worked within the black academic community and featured many prominent African-Americans on its advisory board, such as U. S. Senator Edward Brooke, U. S. Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, and the scholar John Blassingame. In 1974, Fort Pillow was one of the first thirteen African-American sites elevated to a National Historic Landmark based on the recommendation of the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation. Others on the list included the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery and the Ida B. Wells-Barnett House in Chicago.

A dedication ceremony occurred on November 19, 1975 to present the National Historic Landmark Certificate from the National Park Service to the state park. Present for the ceremony were Tennessee Commissioner of Conservation B. R. Allison, County Judge Jerry Corlew, and

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about one hundred Lauderdale County residents. For the National Park Service, Paul C. Swartz, Chief of Cooperative Activities in the Southeast Region, arrived from Atlanta to present the certificate and make a few remarks. After noting the traditional commemorative theme of other Civil War battles, by mentioning “the gallantry of a Gettysburg and the dogged heroism of a Vicksburg,” Swartz rendered his interpretation of Fort Pillow’s national significance as an event that “will forever shame us as a nation.”

Swartz’s speech focused more on the massacre than the battle. His remarks briefly described the battle, implying the responsibility for the massacre was on the attacking Confederate troops as “they yelled, ‘No Quarter! Forrest demands it!’” Swartz’s understanding of Fort Pillow’s significance emphasized the massacre with his focus on the aftermath of the battle instead of the battle itself. Supporting his interpretation of a massacre, Swartz claimed that “only 12 percent of the black garrison survived Fort Pillow; most of the rest were brutally murdered after surrender.” Describing the Confederate troops as “just average folks,” Swartz’s reason for the massacre was “that many Southerners at the time chose to view all black soldiers as rebellious slaves who deserved only the treatment traditionally reserved for slaves in revolt—instant death.”

Swartz’s view reflected the significance placed on Fort Pillow by the Afro-American Bicentennial Committee in selecting Fort Pillow for National Historic Landmark status. Marcia M. Greenlee, the Historical Projects Director of the Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation, filled out the National Register for Historic places nomination form. She stated that Fort Pillow

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was historically significant to the nation because it “clearly establish[ed] the refusal of
Confederates to treat black men as soldiers” and “symbolize[d] the Southern view of the future
for blacks in the South.”312 The Tennessee Historical Commission’s argument that all
participants had a “burden of responsibility” did not appear at all in the nomination form. In
Swartz’s comments and the language of the form, the massacre was strictly viewed within racial
terms. It contained no mention of battle fatigue as a cause and only a brief mention of the
Tennessee Unionists at the fort. Furthermore, Swartz did not include any description of the
Union garrison’s inexperience or ineptitude during the battle. This depiction of the battle did not
produce the desired effect of bravery and devotion, as hoped for by park planners; instead it
purposefully directed the responsibility onto Confederate troops and declared racism as the sole
motivation.313

Swartz’s concluding observations contrasted with the strict military history interpretation
by offering commentary about race relations in America. Bluntly stating, “What can Fort Pillow
say to us in the here and now – in 1975,” Swartz offered this observation on historical continuity:

> It would smack strongly of platitude and ‘cop out’ to allude to the great social strides we
> have all taken in the 111 years since the Fort Pillow events. It would be unforgivably
> shallow if we were to proclaim Fort Pillow as representative of some dreadful “before” in
> social and race relations and the present age as a contrasting, utopian “after.” While the
> truth would not be absent from such a comparison, the lesson of Fort Pillow is deeper,
> more ominous and more everlasting than that.

> Fort Pillow must stand always as a shameful reminder of how close we are to the cruelest
> and most despicable barbarism. Perhaps we do well to be reminded that the spectre of
> savagery does not lurk too far from the warm campfire light of this current age—even in
> America. Perhaps if Fort Pillow does nothing more than this, it will have done enough—

312 The use of contemporary scholarship is apparent in the NHL Application. Greenlee utilizes Dudley T. Cornish,
Benjamin Quarles, and James McPherson to support her description of the Fort Pillow Massacre. None of these
scholars were cited by state authorities in the development of interpretation at Fort Pillow. Greenlee, Nomination
Form for Fort Pillow, 8.
313 Greenlee, Nomination Form for Fort Pillow, 8.
It will have served to keep us utterly realistic about the enigmatic nature of man, ourselves, and what we are capable of if we let the beast be uncaged.314

Swartz highlighted the importance of Fort Pillow to American race relations, which offered a unique perspective not seen at many other Civil War battlefields. Swartz purposefully directed the audience’s attention to the continuity of racial violence in American history since 1864, although without mentioning specifics. A brief overview would have shown that the violence at Fort Pillow preceded the race riots and terror campaigns by white southerners during the Reconstruction era. Similar events occurred during the Jim Crow era and lasting into the Civil Rights movement. The audience listening to Paul Swartz in 1975 was barely ten years removed from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and only seven years, plus about sixty miles, removed from the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.

These connections revealed the uncompleted work of the Civil War and did not often appear at battlefield commemorations. Traditional Civil War battlefield commemoration celebrated the valor and sacrifice of Americans, northern and southern, who gave their “last full measure of devotion” so that the nation could become what it is today. That message was attempted at Fort Pillow by the state park planners, with landscaping and a strictly military-themed interpretation on the battlefield. Swartz’s remarks about the difficulties faced by African Americans during the Civil War and since promoted a separate importance of the park, distinct from the state’s interpretation of the park.315

Swartz’s comments embody a unique moment in Civil War remembrance. Swartz justified his view by openly stating that “we have to ‘tell it like it is’ and see the past event, as it were, ‘in cold blood.’” The lesson of Fort Pillow was transformed into a cautionary warning about “the spectre of savagery” in American society, instead of the traditional message of

314 Paul C. Swartz, “Remarks Prepared for Delivery.”
315 Paul C. Swartz, “Remarks Prepared for Delivery.”
soldierly duty and fidelity. Swartz draws mostly from the National Historic Landmark application, with its descriptions of the brutal violence inflicted upon black soldiers at Fort Pillow. A speaker at a dedication, however, does not solely rely upon the historical record to describe the purpose for the dedication. Swartz, speaking in 1975, reflects within his words on Fort Pillow the concerns of many Americans following the Vietnam War, which like the Civil War, did not provide a clear resolution once combat ended. The speech provides a glimpse on the changing views of Americans toward combat and war following a conflict that dramatically altered perceptions of warfare because of its accessibility and unedited depiction on television. The violence at Fort Pillow resonates with an audience familiar with the My Lai Massacre and the ongoing Church Committee hearings.316

Vietnam also received the largest percentage of African American servicemen up to that point in American history and, along with the Civil Rights Movement, greatly influenced the renewed interest in black history across the country.317 Fort Pillow’s designation as a National Historic Landmark represented the shift toward a more inclusive commemorative landscape in the United States. There appeared in the 1970s a willingness on the part of institutions to begin a recognition of the diverse history of the nation and, as in the case of Fort Pillow, attempt to reconcile painful episodes of the past. Often such recognition became part of the activists’ platforms alongside those of legal rights, better schooling, and better paying jobs. The appearance of new narratives, however, did not go unnoticed by other stakeholders. At Fort Pillow, the professional planning and organization of the state park service created set the stage for a very public debate on the meaning and purpose of the site. The inclusion of the federal

government as part of the commemorative process toward establishing a historic park brought with it greater legal protection and gravitas, but also granted worth to a different interpretation of the site. Swartz’s controversial speech at Fort Pillow initiated a debate at the park that would continue through the 1980s and influence greatly the interpretational programming at the site.

On November 19, 1975, an article appeared in the late edition of the *Memphis Press Scimitar*. The headline read “Fort Pillow a Reminder of Shame or Glory?” Identifying Paul Swartz as “representing the Secretary of the Interior,” the article printed his remark that “Fort Pillow must stand always as a shameful reminder of how close we are to the cruelest and most despicable barbarism.” The next day, the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* contained a follow up-article entitled, “Did General Forrest Murder 250 Blacks?” Over the next week, similar articles appeared in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* and *The Lauderdale County Enterprise*. Each article included Swartz’s quote.318

Swartz’s comments immediately caused a controversy among the local population and within the Tennessee Department of Conservation. Swartz’s interpretation of the site’s importance, along with the interpretation argued in the National Historic Landmark application, appeared at odds with the interpretation of locals and the state of Tennessee. The debate took on the appearance of a struggle between the federal government and the state for the site’s interpretation. The rising inclusion of African American’s roles in the Civil War, and the growing acceptance of the massacre interpretation among scholars, prevented the state from venerating both sides equally. Likewise, the continued local acceptance of the southern interpretation of the battle prevented the site from memorializing the Union forces. Other struggles over interpretation, both internal and public, occurred over the next ten years. These

incidents resulted in further modifications from that stated in the Master Plan. Economic and environmental influences beyond the control of the Department of Conservation caused some of the changes at Fort Pillow, but the presence of two differing narratives overwhelmingly contributed to problematic interpretational programming at Fort Pillow.

In the aftermath of the National Historic Landmark ceremony, public demands were made for an apology. Marilyn Williamson, an employee at the Natchez Trace State Resort Park, wrote to State Representative Edward F. Williams, requesting that he “provide the Tennessee Department of Conservation with rebuttal information concerning the designation of Fort Pillow” as significant to the nation’s history because of a racial massacre. In a letter to B. R. Allison, Commissioner of the Department of Conservation, Williams agreed to provide information “since it appears that Federal officials are determined to continue to use Civil War propaganda, discredited more than a century ago, in their reference to this Tennessee State Park.” Williams argued that the accusations of a massacre were nothing more than Federal propaganda. The massacre was the invention of “Warhawks” in the Union government, who “were seeking some event which could be used to bolster patriotic fervor for the apparently hopeless and unending war.” Williams compared this war-weariness of the North in 1864 to that of the American public following the Tet Offensive in 1968. Increasing morale in the North during the summer of 1864 “was the sole purpose of the Congressional investigation.” Citing some of the discrepancies in the report, Williams presented the traditional southern interpretation of the battle. Atrocities were exaggerated and the high death toll was the result of the battle itself, as well as the fault of the Union garrison for not surrendering when demanded by Confederate forces. Williams concluded his letter by stating “that it is neither the duty nor the responsibility of the Tenn. Department of Conservation to aid the National Park Service in perpetuating
erroneous propaganda which was manufactured more than 111 years ago.” He does, however, council against “any counter-crusade” toward the National Park Service. Stating that “the ‘ Bloody Shirt’ became unfashionable political attire in the 1880’s,” Williams concluded that there was “no advantage [for state parks] in allowing Federal officials to use our state agency to resurrect it now.”

This advice was meant to avoid any further controversy and publicity, but also reflected the lack of control the Federal government actually had at Fort Pillow. National Historic Landmark status does not transfer control of a historic site to the Federal government; it merely denotes “national significance.” Interaction with the National Park Service was limited to an annual visit by a park representative. Containing no authority over the interpretation of the site, Williams probably felt it politically sensible to avoid further confrontation on the issue. Instead, Williams advocated that the staff at Fort Pillow and park service officials be provided with material from Jordan’s article in the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* and other articles published in the *West Tennessee Historical Society Papers*. Along with these articles, Williams also provided a complimentary copy of his own pamphlet, *Confederate Victories at Fort Pillow*.

B. R. Allison’s responded to Williams’ letter a week later, agreeing that Swartz’s comments at the “ceremony was not the time to present such a biased view-point of the circumstances surrounding the Battle of Fort Pillow.” In Allison’s personal opinion, Swartz’s speech was “unjustified, stilted, and pedantic.” Furthermore, Allison agreed with Herbert Harper, Director of the State Historical Commission, that “an apology from their [National Historic Landmarks Program] office is indicated.” Apparently, Allison felt the state did deserve

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some type of explanation from the Federal government, despite Williams’ avoid any confrontation over the issue.321

As individuals within the state agencies responded to the consequences of Swartz’s remarks, a response from the local community appeared in a Memphis newspaper. Responding to the article in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, an editorial was published on November 30, 1975, by Forest V. Durand of Jackson, Tennessee. Citing Swartz’s “despicable barbarism” quote, Durand argued that the battle “was a significant victory” because “its purpose was to destroy a base used principally as support for marauding and depredations against the people of the surrounding West Tennessee area.” Echoing Williams’ complaint about the Congressional investigation, Durand also believed that it was wartime propaganda. Emphasizing that the report was produced “while the war was still in progress,” Durand sarcastically added that it was “a real good setting for a fair and impartial study.”322

The controversy received no visible attention from the local chapters of the NAACP or any local African Americans. The African American newspaper in Memphis, *The Tri-State Defender*, contained no mention of the ceremony or the subsequent controversy. In fact the creation and development of the site, at least on the state level, was conducted by white officials and community leaders with no evidence of input from the black community. Racial inequality existed even through the 1970s, specifically with desegregation still an ongoing concern in West Tennessee. For example, Durand’s editorial shared the page with one from Dr. W. W. Gibson. An African American, Gibson did not write about racial inequality in 1864, but about “discrimination in housing patterns” in contemporary Memphis. Other than the federal government’s choice of a different narrative, nothing else appeared to counter the state’s plan to

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continue implementing a traditional interpretation at Fort Pillow State Historic Park.

Unbeknownst to them, Swartz’s remarks would soon find supporters among Tennessee State Park planners as the park continued expanding its interpretational programming.323

At the time of the NHL ceremony, only the trails existed at the battlefield. The Master Plan Report outlined the development of the site into three phases. Phase I included the examination and excavation of the battlefield site, Phase II included the construction of the main buildings at the site, and Phase III included the construction of secondary facilities around the park and the clearance of the landscape on the battlefield. Only Phases I and II were ever fully completed. Phase III, plagued by a lack of funding and environmental concerns, remained uncompleted. The creation of a “vista between the Union fort” and Forrest’s command position never occurred after studies showed that “such a clearing operation would create uncontrollable erosion.” These setbacks, coupled with the continued disputes over interpretation, resulted in a very different historic site than the one envisioned in the Master Plan Report.324

Part of the first phase involved the archeological excavations of the Union fort, where the main action of the battle occurred. The Division of Archaeology, within the Department of Conservation, received $20,466.22 for expenses to cover the fieldwork and laboratory tests. Working in conjunction with Memphis State University, the Division of Archaeology completed excavations between July 15 and September 30, 1976, under the supervision of Robert C. Mainfort, Jr.325

The allocation of additional funds of $66,653.32 during the summers of 1977 and 1978 allowed for archeological excavations at the site of the Union fort and elsewhere in the park.

Phase II of the Master Plan included the recreation of the Union fort, as well as “the construction of an interpretive center, ranger’s house, and a family camping area.” Before the construction of these facilities started, excavations needed to be conducted at these locations. Pottery, glass shards, tobacco pipes, bullets, and even pieces of human bone were discovered at the excavations over the three summers. Some of these artifacts were incorporated into the interpretive center exhibits, which was also designed at the same time as construction of the fort.326

On a visit to the site in September 1979, Assistant Commissioner Tim W. McCall of the Department of Conservation “found that there were several unanswered problems confronting” the site and that “these problems resulted from the absence of a comprehensive interpretation plan for the Fort Pillow Historic Area.”327 One of these problems was the mistakes made in recreating the Union fort, resulting in the construction of a historically inaccurate reproduction because of poor planning and the lack of an onsite archeologist or historian to assist the contractors. An “error in the survey map of the fort” resulted in the southern portion being forty feet too short, while the angles of the parapet wall were modified to prevent instability in the replica. As mentioned in a newspaper article about the reproduction fort, many Civil War fortifications were “temporary . . . and was not intended for long occupancy.”328 This experience led Mainfort to question “the desirability of attempting this kind of restoration on a National Register site.”329

In response, McCall created the Fort Pillow Interpretive Masterplan Team. The team consisted of Dan Webber from the Planning Division of the department, Robert Mainfort from

326 Construction of these facilities, as well as the reproduction of the Union fort, did not occur until the spring of 1979. Mainfort, Archaeological Investigations, 77, 133.
327 Tim W. McCall to Walt Criley, Herb Harper, Don Charpio, and Joe Benthall, September 18, 1979, “Robert C. Mainfort Papers,” Mississippi Valley Collection at the University of Memphis.
328 “Restored Fort Pillow Minus Some History,” The Lauderdale County Enterprise, June 19, 1980.
Archeology, Nick Fielder from Historical, and Charles Tate from Program Services. Robert Mainfort was appointed to the position of Team Coordinator. In their preliminary meeting on September 25, 1979, the Interpretive Masterplan divided the target audience of the park into five groups: Civil War enthusiasts, general curiosity, hikers, racially biased visitors, and the local public. The “three general impressions” these visitors were to come away with were outlined. The first was that “there was a ‘massacre’ at Fort Pillow” and that the “Union press may have used this incident… to further its own cause.” The second was that the fort’s importance had declined from the beginning of the war and did not have any strategic importance in April 1864. The third was that the Union fort’s location had been located and identified. The Interpretive Masterplan team created “The Fort Pillow State Historic Area Interpretive Plan” in October, 1979 and sent it to the directors of each of the divisions in the Department of Conservation.330

Incorporating the three interpretive themes outlined in the preliminary meeting, the Interpretive Plan focused exclusively on the historical interpretation of the battle and advocated that the “vast majority of interpretation at Fort Pillow should deal with the Civil War history.”331 While mentioning the importance of natural history and cultural history, the Interpretive Plan was clear that:

The main interpretive objective of this Historic Area is to communicate the unique historical significance of the area to the visiting public so that he or she can relate in a real and meaningful way to the historic event which took place here and to the physical historic features of the area.332

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330 Fort Pillow Interpretive Masterplan Team Minutes for Preliminary Meeting, September 25, 1979, “Robert C. Mainfort Papers,” Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis. A typo occurs on the first page of this document, indicating September 12 as the date instead of September 25; Dan Webber to Bob Vories, August 6, 1980, “Robert C. Mainfort Papers,” Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis.
The interpretation of the battle and aftermath presented at the historic site was a cause for great concern, due to the sensitivity of the subject matter. Herbert Harper reacted to the proposed Interpretive Plan by reminding McCall of Paul Swartz’s comments. Harper stated that the “great deal of resentment on the part of the local citizens” resulted in “calls from everyone from the governor on down.” He added that the Tennessee Historical Commission “were happy to be able to say that we had nothing to do with it.” Harper’s suggestion was “that the term ‘massacre’ should be down-played,” since there existed “a great deal of controversy over what occurred, with very reputable historians on both sides of the issue.” Harper concluded by suggesting that both versions be presented equally “and let the visitor draw the conclusion he wishes, because there is no way to resolve the issue at this point.”

Even though the State retained complete control over the development and interpretation of the site, the emphasis on the battle’s aftermath in the National Historic Landmark application, as well as in Swartz’s comments, was a warning for Harper of the dangers inherent in commemoration at Fort Pillow. Hoping to avoid further controversy and public backlash, the suggestion to present both sides equally was incorporated into the exhibits and the audio visual presentation later created for the Interpretive Center. Unforeseen, however, were the internal debates that occurred among state park personnel over interpretation.

Dan Webber from Planning Division produced plans for the Interpretive Center almost nine months before the Interpretative Masterplan team submitted their report. The plans indicated an Interpretation Center divided between an audiovisual program and exhibits. The battle and its aftermath were presented through the audiovisual program, while panels and exhibits in the museum interpreted Fort Pillow throughout the entire war with minimal

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information on the battle. Webber outlined a museum divided into twelve units, such as the
evolution of Fort Pillow during the war, archeology at the Fort Pillow site, Confederate and
Union weapons, and the life of a Union soldier at a Mississippi garrison. The battle did receive
attention in two areas, with one panel devoted to the tactical maneuvers during the battle. The
aftermath of the battle, entitled “Fort Pillow Incident,” would be presented through “both
Confederate and Union perspectives,” reflecting the suggestion Herbert Harper later made in
response to the Interpretative Masterplan report.  

Over two years passed between the development of Webber’s broad exhibit outline and
the creation of an extensive outline for the site’s exhibits. During this period the broad outline
listed in Webber’s memorandum was kept intact, with the exception that the presentation of the
battle and aftermath were further relegated to the audiovisual presentation and greatly reduced in
the museum’s exhibits. According to the Interpretive Plan, these two subjects were considered
“necessarily detailed” and it was decided that “the visitor can absorb more detailed information
through this medium than through exhibits.”

Developed in the summer of 1981, the exhibit content for Fort Pillow offered a very
broad overview of the Fort’s history during the Civil War. The controversial nature of the site
was presented up front, with the visitor encountering “Fort Pillow: Conflict and Controversy” at
the very first panel. This section contained two quotes, one supporting the pro-southern view by
Col. Robert MuCulloch, one of Forrest’s brigade commanders who was present at the battle, and
a pro-massacre view by Horace Greeley, the editor of the New York Tribune, who was not

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334 Dan Webber to Bob Mainfort, January 25, 1979, “Robert C. Mainfort Papers,” Mississippi Valley Collection,
University of Memphis.
present at the battle. The next panel was entitled “Controversy” and contained this brief overview:

To this day, controversy surrounds the Southern capture of Fort Pillow. An immediate investigation by the Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War stirred Northern indignation by labeling the battle a massacre. Cited were Forest’s [sic] reputation for giving his enemy little quarter, the Union’s overwhelming losses, and survivor’s accounts of troops being shot while trying to surrender.

The South claimed that panic and inexperience caused the Union its huge loss of life. There were no reprisals by Union military leaders, which suggests that Grant, Sherman, and others disbelieved the reports of Confederate barbarity.

Accompanying this text were photographs of General Forrest and an infantry charge, along with the Congressional Report, and articles about the battle in The Daily Richmond Enquirer and the New York Sun. What followed, however, made no reference to the controversy and barely mentioned the battle itself. Descriptions of the subsequent exhibits featured information about Fort Pillow’s development, daily life at the fort for Confederate and Union soldiers, and the Battle of Plum Point Bend. Some of the artifacts uncovered during the digs were displayed here, under a panel entitled “Artifacts of Fort Pillow.”

Only toward the end, did the museum turn back toward the battle of Fort Pillow. Entitled “A Confederate Triumph,” this panel contained a photograph of an artilleryman and one of the newspaper’s illustrations of the Fort Pillow massacre, with a short description of the battle:

On April 12, 1864 about 1,500 Confederate troops under the command of General Nathan Bedford Forrest overwhelmed the Union garrison at Fort Pillow. The Southern forces had taken the enemy by surprise and surrounded the fort before Forrest offered the Union commander an opportunity to surrender. The offer was refused, and Forrest gave the command to attack. Of the 557 Union troops at Fort Pillow, 221 were slain. Only 58 of the 262 Black troops walked away as prisoners. The remainder were either killed or badly wounded. Confederate losses included only 14 killed and 86 wounded.

335 See Figure Twenty-Four for the full quotes.
337 “Fort Pillow Visitors Center Exhibit,” 2, 8.
338 “Fort Pillow Visitors Center Exhibit,” 19.
Visitors received very little information about the aftermath of the battle, or the resulting Congressional investigation, beyond that of casualty numbers. No mention is made of the impact Fort Pillow had on northern morale or among African American soldiers. Forrest’s purpose in attacking the fort, his mission in West Tennessee during the spring of 1864, and the presence of Tennessee Unionists at the fort is also never mentioned. The controversial nature of the battle is mentioned in the first panel of the exhibit, but no explanation is provided beyond a broad
summary of each side’s version. The museum attempted to cover everything about the history of Fort Pillow except what happened on April 12, 1864.

The audiovisual presentation promised to provide an interpretation of the battle and its impact on the war. The program took the form of a slideshow with audio played over each slide. Robert C. Mainfort, Jr. wrote the preliminary script for the program, which was ready by the second meeting of the Interpretive Masterplan Team on October 4, 1979. About a week before this meeting, Mainfort sent the script draft to Dr. Bobby Lovett, an African American historian at Tennessee State University. This appears to be the first time on the state level that an African American scholar got involved in developing interpretation at Fort Pillow. Mainfort included a cover letter with the script, indicating to Lovett that the script is “drawn heavily on the article by Castel (1958)” and requesting his “comments on the text and how it would be received by the Black community.”

Mainfort’s script exclusively used the Castel’s 1958 article, quoting it verbatim in several places. While Lovett’s comments were positive overall, he did caution the use of one slide picture depicting the moment Confederate forces overwhelmed the garrison. This picture, used in the 1908 edition of John Wyeth’s biography on Forrest and later reproduced in William’s pamphlet, portrayed a black Union soldier fleeing from the Confederates in panic. In Lovett’s opinion it “illustrates the big-eyed scary, stupid Sambo image of the Negro” and advised portraying the black soldiers as “fighting bravely and courageously until death.” He suggested replacing it with the Kurz & Allison illustration, which depicted Confederate troops massacring black soldiers as well as women and children. Lovett also advised that Mainfort edit his script

down, a comment that was repeated over the next several months by other readers. Meant to be a short presentation, Mainfort reduced his script over the next few months to just five pages.  

Length was not the only problem with Mainfort’s initial script. Wayne Hogan, of the Planning Division, received the script for editing following its approval by the Interpretative Masterplan Team. Mainfort, upon later receiving Hogan’s edits, expressed his displeasure to Dan Webber. After briefly describing a new script that limited the presentation to thirteen minutes, Mainfort called Hogan’s revisions of the script “totally unacceptable.” He added that he “prefer[ed] not to make specific comments on it since doing so may further strain relations between our Divisions.”

Hogan’s revisions to Mainfort’s script have yet to be located, however a week later Mainfort sent Hogan a memorandum explaining his displeasure and including specific comments. Hogan’s script did not “deal adequately with the logistics of the battle and, more importantly, the massacre controversy.” Along with this “major problem,” Mainfort described the revised script as “not retaining any of the integrity of the script previously supplied by me and which was accepted by the interpretative team.” Towards the conclusion, Mainfort pointed out that Hogan’s “role in this matter was to have been that of editor . . . not that of principal author.”

Several of Mainfort’s criticisms of Hogan’s revisions were attached to this memo. Of particular note was Mainfort’s critique on a section about the massacre, in which he noted that “the evidence suggested that many, not ‘several’ unarmed Union soldiers were killed while

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attempting surrender.” Mainfort also commented that Hogan’s “description of the massacre controversy is far too short.” Mainfort also critiqued the sloppiness in Hogan’s script. Hogan’s use “of the term ‘Negro’ does not take into account contemporary Black consciousness.” Hogan also made historically inaccurate statements, such as that Forrest had artillery and that Fort Henry and Fort Donelson were located in the Mississippi River Valley.\(^{343}\)

Hogan’s revised script was apparently drastically different from the one Mainfort had sent for editing. This led him to conclude that either Hogan was not properly instructed in his job or that “despite the consensus of the interpretive team, you chose to prepare an alternative script.” Dismissing the problem as “not one of ‘Mainfort’s interpretation’ versus ‘Hogan’s interpretation,’” Mainfort pointed out that “it was the opinion of the interpretive team that the logistics of the battle and a balanced account of the massacre controversy should be presented.” Pursuant to the guidelines set out in the Interpretive Plan, the Team had final say over the script. Mainfort’s revisions over the next few months shortened the length of the script, but maintained its integrity.\(^{344}\)

Mainfort approached the interpretative programming at Fort Pillow with a willingness to include the massacre and its consequences in the interpretation of the site. A professionally trained archeologist, Mainfort represented the training and specialization that marked a difference in state park service starting in the 1970s. Fort Pillow should, in Mainfort’s professional opinion, utilize the most recent scholarship in order to better understand the battle and educate the public. As an employee of the Tennessee government, however, his emphasis on the massacre encountered pushback from other staff members. Hogan’s response to Mainfort’s script could be described as a concern for the public’s response to the narrative or it could

\(^{343}\) Mainfort to Hogan, November 20, 1979.  
\(^{344}\) Mainfort to Hogan, November 20, 1979.
represent Hogan’s affinity toward the traditional narrative. No evidence is available to clearly
decide, but the ability of Mainfort to effectively challenge Hogan stresses the importance of what
qualified public historians can do to influence the interpretative message of a historic site.

Over the next two years the script continued undergoing revisions, mostly including new
research and editing for time. Mainfort continued to emphasize the black soldier’s experience at
Fort Pillow. He sent a new draft of the script to Dan Webber on October 25, 1980 that included
more background information on the recruitment of black soldiers in western Tennessee from the
contraband camps. He also emphasized that the Confederate government “viewed armed blacks,
not as soldiers of war, but as either property to be restored to its owners or insurrectionaries to be
executed.”345 The lack of information about the battle in the museum would be rectified in the
audiovisual presentation.

What follows is a brief overview of the eight minute audiovisual presentation that the
public viewed during those four weeks in 1982. The majority of the program was narrated, with
voice actors employed to read two primary source quotes from Confederate soldiers. Period
illustrations and portraits were shown alongside a few shots of the natural landscape around Fort
Pillow. Avoiding any source that was not written or recorded in the days following the battle,
the script attempted to “describe the scene for us in their own words.”346

The description of the battle and its aftermath came from the *Official Records of the War
of the Rebellion* and from the Congressional Report. Secondary source material came from
Albert Castel’s article, considered at the time the most reputable scholarly work on Fort Pillow at
the time. The battle’s aftermath was described by quoting two Confederate soldiers, Sgt.

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345 Robert C. Mainfort to Dan Webber, October 25, 1980, “Robert C. Mainfort Papers,” Mississippi Valley
Collection, University of Memphis.
Valley Collection, University of Memphis.
Achilles Clark and Surgeon Samuel H. Caldwell. Clark’s description of the massacre, taken from a letter he wrote to his sister a few days later, is included in full:

Our men were so exasperated by the Yankee threats of no mercy, that they gave them but little. The slaughter was awful. Words can’t describe the scene. The poor deluded negroes would run up to our men, fall on their knees and with uplifted hands, scream for mercy. But they were ordered to their feet and then shot down. Human blood stood about in pools! I, with several others tried to stop the butchery.347

Caldwell’s comment that “if General Forrest had not run between our men and the Yanks with his pistol and sabre drawn, not a man would have been spared” offered evidence that Forrest had not deliberately ordered the massacre. Toward the end, the presentation recounted how northern newspaper’s labeled the battle a massacre, subsequently leading to the investigation by the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. The concluding paragraph mentioned the growing acceptance of the southern interpretation after the war, stating that it “only came under serious questioning by historians during the 1950s.” It concluded by stating that the fort was taken legitimately by southern forces. Once in possession of the fort, Confederate forces “then killed a large number of the Union garrison out of a combination of personal animosity and battle fury,” which occurred “after many of the Federals had either ceased resisting or were incapable of resisting.”348

Both the audiovisual presentation and the museum exhibits were available for viewing on April 12, 1982 when the Interpretive Center was dedicated. Between April 13 and May 7, “approximately one thousand people viewed the program” at Fort Pillow. On May 7, the audiovisual presentation was stopped and removed from service. “Approximately 40-50 people

348 Charpio to Williams, June 15, 1982.
lodged complaints” against the program during the four weeks of operation.349 Among the most vociferous of critics was a local attorney, T. Tarry Beasley, II. He sent a letter on May 21, 1982 to Charles A. Howell, the Commissioner of Conservation. Written on the letterhead of his law office, Neely, Green & Fargarson in Memphis, Beasley asked whether “it is true that the Tennessee Department of Conservation . . . has slandered the name of the Southern soldiers who so gallantly fought to defend their homes, wives and farms from the onslaught of the Yankee invasion.” He called the audiovisual presentation “a biased, untruthful, derogatory and slanderous representation of the battle and subsequent events at Fort Pillow.” Beasley also sent copies of this letter to Governor Lamar Alexander, United States Senators Howard Baker and Jim Sasser, United States Congressman Robin Beard, local units of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and Sons of the Confederate Veterans, and The Commercial Appeal and The Memphis Press-Scimitar. Unable to “invision [sic] why our own state would slander our own people, ancestors and one of the noted generals of the war,” Beasley proceeded to recount the standard pro-southern view of the battle. The garrison were guilty of “continual plunder and raping in the area” and the “Union troops were staggering drunk” during the battle.350

On May 25, 1982, an article appeared in The Memphis Press-Scimitar, featuring some of Beasley’s comments as well as further remarks. Described by the paper as a “local Civil War researcher,” Beasley is mentioned as a lawyer and an active member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Describing his feelings toward the presentation, Beasley stated “that someone, inadvertently I hope, has taken the Yankee propaganda published during the course of the war

... and adopted it as gospel.” Asked to participate in a reenactment by Fort Pillow State Historic Park, Beasley stated that “as long as the park was showing that very lopsided presentation, we [his SCV unit] agreed that we didn’t want to get involved and stir up a lot of mess.” His comments at the end of the Press-Scimitar article were more candid:

We want to help them in whatever way we can . . . . I just find it hard to believe that our own Tennesseans would put this out. I’d understand it better if it was a national park with some Yankee bureaucrat in Washington or Boston writing the commentary. But right here at home?351

Beasley suggested that the presentation “obtain some help thorough [sic] local historical associations” and “personally recommend[ed]” Ed Williams to assist in the revisions.352 In a response to Beasley, Commissioner Howell agreed that Williams was “a historian in whom I have considerable confidence.” He offered to “have members of the interpretive team get in touch with Ed for purposes of reviewing the presentation as to its historical authenticity.” Howell concluded the letter by commending Beasley “for your patriotism” in the matter.353

The article in the Press-Scimitar stated that the audiovisual presentation was stopped because of a “malfunction in the projector.”354 By the time of Beasley’s letter, however, the program had not been shown for nearly two weeks. A memorandum from Robert C. Mainfort confirmed that the “malfunction” claim was a cover story. Dated May 11, Mainfort had just “recently learned that the audio-visual program at Fort Pillow has . . . been put in mothballs due to objections from local citizens.” Mainfort emphasized the “obligation to present factual interpretive programs to the public,” and stated that “the program as it stands is excellent.”

Mainfort summarized all the criticisms into two main point, “namely that there was a massacre

354 Howell to Beasley, June 2, 1982.
of black troops at Fort Pillow and that one of Tennessee’s ‘favorite sons’ was the commander of
the troops who massacred the blacks.” Defending against these criticisms, which he saw as
“simply a matter of historical fact, unpleasant though they may be,” Mainfort supported the
decisions made in creating the program:

In describing the battle and subsequent massacre, we (i.e., the parties involved in the
preparation of the program) chose simply to allow some of the Confederate participants
describe the scene for us in their own words. If what they observed was ghastly, the
Department should not feel obliged to apologize for it, particularly to someone who feels
that his favorite general has been slandered.\footnote{Mainfort to Charpio and Criley, May 11, 1982; Don Charpio to Ed Williams, June 15, 1982, “Fort Pillow State
Park File,” Department of Environment and Conservation, Nashville, Tennessee.}

Mainfort concluded his memo by adding that he “would hate to see the Department revise the
program in such a way that popular opinion took precedence over historical fact.” During a
meeting of the Departmental Interpretation Committee on June 1, 1982, “it was determined that
revisions and modifications to the script and visual presentation were necessary.” Two weeks
later, despite Mainfort’s wishes and following the suggestion of Beasley, Ed Williams was asked
by Don Charpio, Director of Parks and Recreation, to review the script and offer “comments
concerning the accuracy of the information cited and the choice of wording used.” As the editor
of the pro-southern booklet, Confederate Victories at Fort Pillow and a member of the Sons of
Confederate Veterans, the choice of Williams reflected the concession of the Department to the
Lost Cause view of the battle. Revisions of the script were still ongoing the following summer,
leaving only the museum exhibit as the only interpretive display at the Interpretive Center.\footnote{Robert C. Mainfort to Don Charpio and Walter Criley, May 11, 1982, “Robert C. Mainfort,” Mississippi Valley
Collection, University of Memphis.}

Fort Pillow State Historic Park developed most of its buildings, landscape, and
interpretation between the years of 1975-1982. A reproduction of the fort, slightly historically
inaccurate, trails, and an Interpretive Center allowed visitors to tour the battlefield. The

\footnote{Mainfort to Charpio and Criley, May 11, 1982 ; Don Charpio to Ed Williams, June 15, 1982, “Fort Pillow State
Park File,” Department of Environment and Conservation, Nashville, Tennessee.}
development of an interpretive program for the site, however, was unable to ignore the growing acceptance of the “massacre” interpretation among historical scholars. Seeking to strike a balance between the fort’s existence during the war, the battle, and the massacre, an interpretive program was established that offered opportunities for the visitor to receive a broad historical overview of Fort Pillow during the Civil War. The Interpretive Center exhibits stressed the fort’s history throughout the war, leaving the serious examination of the battle and massacre to the audiovisual presentation. When the battle was mentioned in the exhibit, it briefly notes the existence of a controversy while offering no further evidence. Only during the audiovisual presentation was the battle and aftermath portrayed with detailed information, using the latest historical research and information. It even concluded with an offer to the viewer to “examine for yourself the large body of literature available in the park library.” Stopping the audiovisual presentation represented a victory for the traditional narrative and indicated an interpretational shift away from the emerging scholarly view of the battle’s aftermath as racially motivated.357

The consequence of these interpretative decisions greatly impacted the future development of the site. Over a decade after its inception, much of Fort Pillow battlefield remained a wilderness. Trails existed throughout the woods and ravines, but the landscape did not reflect the 1864 battlefield. The reproduction fort was surrounded by thick underbrush and tall trees. Signs denoting rifle pits or 1861 Confederate fortifications existed, but there were very few detailed interpretational panels. The Interpretive Center contained an exhibit that examined the fort’s history during the Civil War with only minimal information about the battle. The audiovisual presentation was under review and did not run. Outside the front door of the Interpretive Center was the National Historic Landmark plaque, which states that “this site

possesses national significance in commemorating the history of the United States of America.” Despite the efforts of individuals like Paul Swartz and Robert Mainfort, very little information existed at Fort Pillow to identify for visitors why this site was of national significance after 1982.358

Figure 25. Reproduction Union Fort at Fort Pillow State Historic Area. Camera facing the direction of Forrest’s Command position during the battle, approximately 400 yards beyond the undergrowth. Photograph from Author’s collection.

358 Photograph in author’s possession.
The public resistance to the “massacre” interpretation of Fort Pillow, seen in 1975 and 1982, illustrated the latent memory and power of the Lost Cause, especially toward the memory of Fort Pillow, within the local white population of West Tennessee. Defined within local memory as a Confederate victory meant that any different portrayal was perceived as an attack on “their” history. The martial duty and skill of the Confederate soldier, epitomized by General Forrest, provided an interpretation that white Tennesseans clung to even in the face of countering narratives. This persistence, as Mainfort pointed out, was directed toward denying any accusations of massacre and protecting the legacy of Forrest. The aftermath of the battle could not be overlooked, however, and various different explanations appeared to counter the allegations of racial violence. Yet at Fort Pillow Confederate troops encountered nearly three hundred ex-slaves, trained and armed by the Union army. The casualty rate and the historical record would not disappear, especially within the dual environments of a post-Civil Rights society and the emerging professional fields of public history. The massacre proved nearly impossible to reconcile with the Lost Cause understanding of the war and the resulting fallout froze any future development at Fort Pillow State Historic Park.

In the case of Fort Pillow, the controversy was notable for the dogged nature in which devotees defended their traditional narrative of the battle. Providing any deviation from these two points was unacceptable, as seen with the response to Swartz’s comments and the audiovisual presentation. The endurance of the traditional narrative is notable, especially among many in the local population. A ceremony to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the battle proclaimed to honor “ALL who fought and died for their respective beliefs.” Though long ignored by heritage organizations, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Sons of Confederate Veterans, and the Military Order of the Stars and Bars oversaw this ceremony in
Despite the scholarly acceptance of the massacre, locals still chose to use the traditional narrative even into the 1990s. A chronological history of the county, published in 1996, devoted two chapters to the battle and the aftermath. *Visions of Lauderdale County* cited the *Official Records*, Wyeth, Jordan and Pryor, and John L. Jordan to describe Fort Pillow as a terrible battle with the resulting tragedy the fault of a Union garrison that was unprepared, over confident, and poorly placed “in the middle of a staunch Confederate citizenry” in Lauderdale County. The victims of the battle were in essence the perpetrators of their own fate.\(^{359}\)

A poem, written by Albert F. Parker in 1935, was also included and blamed the bloodshed on violations of the truce:

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April twelve on Tuesday morning eighteen-sixty-four,
So many times, “Grandfather” said big guns began to roar.
All around this old river town, Fort Pillow, Tennessee,
Where General Forrest and the Rebel soldiers won their vic’to-ry.

At the break of day they slipped in quietly loading up their guns,
Kept pushing onward soon they had them Yankees on the run.
Nothing else for them to do; the Rebels had got too rough;
Some sneaked away, some took the water by leaping off down the bluff.

Fort Pillow we never, never, shall forget
Fort Pillow where the Rebs and Yankees met,
Fort Pillow, I’ve always heard it said
at the battle of Fort Pillow the water was running red.

Then about that time this Yankee boat come drifting ‘round the bend
Where General Forrest stood ready and waiting with about twelve hundred men.
Should they come in close enough there’s only one thing to do,
Shoot everything including the captain, everything dressed in blue.

This Yankee boat kept moving in upon the flag of truce.
General Forrest said blow the bugle turn them Rebels loose.
A little too late to turn around, they all met face to face.
The Rebels cut them Yankees down. Fort Pillow was a bloody place.\(^{360}\)
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\(^{360}\) Hellums and McCauley, *Visions of Lauderdale County*, 116.
The efforts of Swartz, Mainfort, and others failed to alter the overall interpretation at Fort Pillow because of the white Tennessean attachment toward Nathan B. Forrest and the pressure placed on state officials to continue promoting the traditional narrative at Fort Pillow. The insistence on including the massacre as a focus for interpretative programming, however, shaped the development of Fort Pillow State Historic Park by what it did not allow to occur. The persistence of a few individuals forced the state park service to confront the past instead of ignoring it, which park planners initially tried to do through an emphasis only on the battle in 1974. Instead the Civil Rights Movement and the growing specialization of public history created the opportunity at Fort Pillow to alter the traditional narrative, while its failure highlighted the entrenchment of the Lost Cause within white Tennessee society. Fort Pillow’s story will never be easily told, but the debates over interpretation during those first few years did set a precedence that the site would be unable to purposefully ignore the aftermath of the battle.
EPILOGUE

Several new shifts in Civil War interpretation became evident in the wake of the sesquicentennial observations. An emphasis on the African American experience, driven by federal legislation, appeared as the most striking difference from earlier commemorations. The impact on the state level was less obvious, because of the independent nature of each state park agency. Nonetheless, the interpretational controversies detailed in this work ended up influencing public debates over commemoration at many of these sites during the sesquicentennial. Olustee witnessed the controversy over a Union monument on the battlefield, ultimately leading to the indefinite postponement of the project by the Florida State Park Service. Poison Springs remained the focal point for the Camden Expedition during the sesquicentennial, with the Camden area providing several opportunities for the public to learn and remember the First Kansas Colored. Jenkins’ Ferry, meanwhile, continued to be downplayed because of its small commemorative size in respect to the historic battlefield.

Fort Pillow’s commemoration of the anniversary in 2014, however, provides a snapshot at the difficulty still facing historic sites of racial violence. The park offered a two day event on April 12-13, 2014. Reenactor camps, cannon demonstrations, and guided hayrides to the fort were offered throughout the weekend. Several scholars on Tennessee Civil War history, such as John Cimprich, Bobby Lovett, and Charles McKinney were also on hand to discuss the history of the battle with visitors. McKinney directly addressed the controversial history of the battle’s interpretation with a facilitated discussion, “Region, Race, and Memory: Inheriting the Civil
War.” A memorial service, held on the afternoon of the twelfth, featured several speakers and a wreath laying by two descendents of the Union garrison.361

The weekend commemoration did not ignore the massacre interpretation, but it also allowed other organizations that promoted the traditional interpretation to participate as well. Mike Daugherty, Commander of the Robert E. Lee SCV Camp in Germantown, Tennessee, attended along with several other SCV members. Members of the Mid-South Flaggers, a pro-Confederate heritage organization, also attended. A wreath from the Elizabeth Bates Williams UDC chapter out of Memphis stood next to wreaths for the Union garrison during the memorial ceremony. Many of these individuals later reported not enjoying the commemorations, with Mike Daugherty reporting in the Camp newsletter that “the less that is said about that [Fort Pillow 150th Anniversary Event], the better.” The Mid-South Flaggers also reported that the “presentations at the memorial service did not even remotely capture the battle” and “it was as if only USCT were present for the battle, totally sober, & trying desperately to surrender while being mowed down by Forrest.”362

The disappointment of Lost Cause supporters at the Fort Pillow commemoration was evident during the entire sesquicentennial. The growing acceptance among state park agencies of African American involvement in the Civil War and the necessity of its presentation to the public has grown significantly since the 1970s. The sesquicentennial observations throughout the country, along with newspaper coverage, films, and educational symposiums, emphasized the racial aspects of the Civil War in a variety of formats. The killing of nine black parishioners in

Charleston toward the end of the sesquicentennial, however, ignited a renewed effort across the South to better understand the legacy of the Civil War. Dylann Roof, the attacker at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, displayed symbols of white power on his Facebook page, which included the Confederate flag. Southern communities began debating the appropriateness of publicly displaying Confederate battle flag and the removal of monuments to Confederate leaders.\textsuperscript{363}

The Olustee Battlefield Citizens Support Organization released a statement on July 7, 2015, reaffirming the display of the Battle Flag because they “would be derelict in their mission if this three day re-enactment . . . did not include historically accurate and authentic materials.” Meanwhile, nearby Lake City voted to remove both the United States flag and the Confederate Battle Flag from its city seal. A contentious public meeting witnessed many supporters of the seal rearticulate the same traditional narrative used during the dedication of the 1912 monument, with one supporter arguing that the city keep the seal because the Confederate soldiers “prevented Lake City from being burned to the ground, pillaged, and destroyed, and they saved the lives of unknown numbers of people.”\textsuperscript{364}

The full impact of these recent events on interpretation at state owned sites of racial violence remains to be seen, but the consequences of racial hatred at Olustee, Poison Springs, Jenkins’ Ferry, and Fort Pillow will continue to be an interpretational challenge for park staff and the public. The changes initiated during the 1970s as a result of the Civil Rights Movement and the growing professionalization of public history slowly altered how these state parks interpreted

their sites. The successes and failures over the past forty years highlight the entrenched nature of the Lost Cause within certain segments of white southern society. Overcoming those obstacles, however, can be achieved through commitments on the part of the state park agency, local heritage organizations, academic scholars, and the public. It is a mistake, however, to believe that through this process the interpretation at any of these sites will get easier. It will not. The racial attitudes and antagonisms displayed on these battlefields are not unfamiliar to present day Americans because of continued evidence of racial inequalities in the present. Confronting them at historic sites will always be difficult for many Americans because these battlefields carry an unpleasant familiarity of our nation’s shortcomings and the realization that our continued struggle toward racial equality is not over.
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