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“At Least Until We Shall Have an American Celebration to Take Its Place.”

African American Celebratory Excursions to Gettysburg, 1880-1915

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A single rose, flanked by miniature flags of the Confederacy and the state of Virginia, lovingly placed at the base of a monument on Seminary Ridge; a young couple, braving the wind and rain, clambering over rocks and gnarled roots to read a monument's inscription on the east side of Little Round Top; a family, standing at The Angle, solemnly envisioning old ghosts of the Blue and the Gray in battle: as one of the best known and most popular historic sites in the United States, a visit to the Gettysburg National Military Park (GNMP), in Adams County, Pennsylvania, conveys the message that this site and its history is one of grave significance for Americans. For over a century, the battlefield has stood as a premier example of the National Parks Service's (NPS) mission to "preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values" of America, and has served as hallowed ground laden with emotional gravity.¹ Furthermore, as one of the first five federally preserved battlefields – the others being Antietam, Chickamauga & Chattanooga, Shiloh, and Vicksburg – the GNMP holds a place as one of the most significant historical sites of the era.

Boasting an average of more than one million visitors per year, the Gettysburg experience has long focused on more than the battle itself, stressing the site's central role in emancipation, with Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address as its focal point.² A tour through the NPS's visitor center, the National Museum of the Civil War at Gettysburg, reinforces this deeper message, as exhibits repeatedly reinforce the role that the battle played in the struggle

¹ "About Us," National Parks Service, accessed March 25, 2017, <http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm>.

² National Parks Service Visitor Use Statistics, accessed March 25, 2017, <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/Reports/Park/Gett>.

to end slavery. From the opening film – the History Channel-produced “New Birth of Freedom,” narrated by Morgan Freeman and featuring the voice-work of other Hollywood talents – to multiple galleries dedicated to, respectively, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the creation, delivery, and lasting meaning of Lincoln’s Address, one is never able to distance themselves from the notion that the Battle of Gettysburg was fought over the very soul of the country, with the future of slavery and black America hanging in the balance.

Although the visitor’s center and its exhibits are recent products of a reinterpretation of the site’s historical narrative, Gettysburg has long been consecrated as the site of two events, a landmark battle in the Civil War, and the location of President Lincoln’s redefinition of the purpose of the war, clarifying the war to be an ideological crusade to end slavery. Additionally, even if it was not explicitly memorialized through exhibits as a site connected with emancipation, Gettysburg has long been associated with the struggle for freedom. In the late-nineteenth century, amidst a fervor of battlefield preservation, Civil War veterans sought to commemorate the valorous sacrifices of their fighting brethren, crafting an enduring memorial for their comrades. With a physical memorial in the shape of monuments and marker-stones, Gettysburg also became laden with an equally powerful ideological spirit of remembrance, one that historian Jennifer Murray described as “an articulation of the Union war aims and the vision of the nation’s ‘new birth of freedom.’” Whether through the battlefield monuments or the Soldiers’ National Cemetery, the GNMP has been “encumbered with an enormous responsibility of preserving the war’s ‘hallowed ground’ and educating the public, not only on

the battle, but also about the Civil War as the nation's defining moment."³ It is this mission which should ideally speak to all Americans, Northerner or Southerner, white or black.

Nevertheless, any lay observer at Gettysburg will notice a stark irony: where, amongst the throngs of visitors, and amid the hallowed halls invoking the message of freedom, are African American tourists? Why is the clientele overwhelmingly white? Surely, this site – the “turning point” of the war, which inexorably led to Northern victory; home to the Gettysburg Address, a fundamental moment in the process of emancipation – holds significance for black Americans too. Still, the truth is undeniable: for all of its storied connection to the end of slavery, African Americans evidently do not feel the sacred connection to this national landmark.

This has not always been true, however. For a brief period in the late nineteenth century, African Americans frequently made excursions to Gettysburg, communing with the site's sacredness in the pursuit of leisure. Primarily drawn from the Baltimore area, black communities regularly organized daytrips to Gettysburg during the 1880s and 1890s, patronizing local businesses, taking an electric trolley ride through the battlefield, and ultimately enjoying the entertainments provided by a series of small amusement parks, chief among which was Round Top Park. Gettysburg proved a popular destination for black pilgrimage, as it tied together working-class leisure establishments, a carnivalesque atmosphere at the amusement parks, and the sacredness of the battlefield itself. In this way, Gettysburg was acknowledged as a site of significance for African American identity, and became more

³ Jennifer M. Murray, *On a Great Battlefield: The Making, Management, and Memory of Gettysburg National Military Park, 1933-2013* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 3.

than simply a place of pilgrimage; it was incorporated into the long tradition of commemorating emancipation by blacks. By the 1910s, however, African Americans had seemingly abandoned Gettysburg, halting their pilgrimages and no longer commemorating the site as they once had, a fact that carries through to today. This naturally begs the question, then, that if, at one time, Gettysburg was an important regional location for celebrating emancipation, what happened to sour this relationship? Furthermore, why do African Americans no longer consider Gettysburg a sacred place of pilgrimage?

This study argues that, by the early 1900s, a combination of ideological concerns and quotidian realities led African Americans to abandon Gettysburg as a place of leisure and commemoration. First, an increase in racial acrimony in Gettysburg on the part of white locals, coupled with the growing skepticism of the value of excursions on the part of black civic leaders made Gettysburg and its white-owned and -operated leisure venues less desirable for African Americans. At the same time, several private interests, including the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association (GBMA), sought to realign the meaning of the site, an initiative that discouraged rowdier and more prosaic entertainments such as those found at Round Top Park in favor of stressing the battlefield's sacredness. This shift subsequently mirrored a national movement mythologizing Civil War battlefields for their valorous significance at the expense of their racial relevance. In the end, African Americans devalued Gettysburg as a site of leisure and pilgrimage because they both no longer felt welcome in the white-dominated town, and they no longer needed the battlefield as a place of memorialization for their racial identity.

Speaking to a crowd in 1857, Frederick Douglass opined that celebrating freedom was essential to African American identity. More than that, though, Douglass encouraged the

establishment of a tradition of commemoration, stating: “I hold it to be eminently fit that we keep up those celebrations from year to year, at least until we shall have an American celebration to take its place.”⁴ Forty years later, W.E.B. DuBois, writing in *Southern Workman*, suggested that leisure activities were also central to African American identity, so much so that “the manner, method, and extent of a people’s recreation is of vast importance to their welfare.”⁵ African American excursions to Gettysburg at the turn of the twentieth century represent the commingling of the messages of both Douglass and DuBois, as the festivities at Round Top Park and their environs reflected both a continuing attempt to commemorate emancipation and a celebration of the spirit of leisure and entertainment. To this end, there are three major historiographical areas associated with this study: the meaning and memory of the Civil War, African American emancipation celebrations, and the culture of leisure in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. This study is informed by and engages with—to a greater or lesser degree—the scholarship on these fields, and for this reason it is worth briefly reviewing the most pertinent literature.

There exists a wealth of literature discussing the Battle of Gettysburg itself, but precious few studies specifically consider the historical memory of what becomes the Gettysburg National Military Park. Leaving aside scholarship on the battle itself, many works that discuss historical memory and the Civil War are focused on white attempts to commemorate and reframe the meaning of the conflict. To this end, David Blight’s *Race and Reunion: The Civil War and American Memory*, W.A. Blair’s *Cities of the Dead*, Caroline Janney’s *Remembering the Civil*

⁴ Frederick Douglass, Speech at Canandaigua, New York, August 4, 1857 (Rochester, NY: CP Dewey, 1857), *Frederick Douglass Papers*, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mfd.21039/?st=gallery>.

⁵ W.E.B. DuBois, “The Problem of Amusement,” *Southern Workman* 26, no. 9 (Sept. 1897): 181.

War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation, and Nina Silber's *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* each explore the contestations over how Americans sought to properly remember and memorialize the Civil War.⁶ Furthermore, each focus on the late- nineteenth-century shift towards North-South reconciliation that de-emphasizes the significance of slavery and emancipation in the narrative of the war. Although this is significant and plays an important role in Gettysburg ultimately losing its place as a sacred site of African American pilgrimage, these studies largely do not discuss how African Americans, who possessed little agency in this ideological transformation, responded to these changes. It is worth noting, however, that Janney considers the implications of reconciliation upon specific constituencies such as women and African Americans, exploring the social consequences of this cultural shift, while Blight tracks the decentralization of emancipation in a movement towards reconciliation, which emphasized the "true" valor of both sides at the expense of deeper considerations of cause and consequence. Furthermore, Kirk Savage's *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* considers attempts to depict slavery and emancipation in monuments, an effort that was largely unsuccessful at Gettysburg.⁷ At Gettysburg, it seems clear that, as whites increasingly manipulated the historical memory of the war to one that both devalued black involvement and ignored the

⁶ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); W.A. Blair, *Cities of the Dead: Contesting the Memory of the Civil War in the South, 1865-1914* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Caroline E. Janney, *Remembering the Civil War: Reunion and the Limits of Reconciliation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁷ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

importance of emancipation, the black community's response to this ideological shift was to abandon the site altogether.

Similarly, a related strain of literature involving Gettysburg and battlefields examines their role in the creation of an American civil religion. Most prominent within this scholarship is Robert Bellah's famous work, "Civil Religion in America," and E.T. Linenthal's *Sacred Ground*, both of which consider Gettysburg as a central location in the formation of this cultural tradition.⁸ For both authors, Gettysburg, and similar sites of ideological importance, have become inextricably linked to the establishment of ethical principles that both transcend the nation and provide a baseline by which the nation should be judged. Furthermore, civil religion is steeped in Judeo-Christian symbolism, and it is through such locations of sacred significance that an American national identity has been codified, and that Americans become aware that our country stands subject to a higher judgment. The authors diverge, however, in identifying Gettysburg's sacred significance—while Bellah focuses on Lincoln's Gettysburg Address as a figurative sacrament of America's soul, Linenthal examines the battlefield itself for its spiritual pastoralism, and the monuments in particular as icons of a collective heroism and valor devoid of Northern and Southern divisiveness.⁹ Similar to studies discussing the historical memory of the Civil War, however, debates over civil religion and Gettysburg as a sacred space rarely consider the African American experience, and then only tangentially, such as Bellah's use of

⁸ Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus*, 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967), 1-21; E.T. Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and their Battlefields* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

⁹ As a work of both cultural history and historical memory, Michael Kammen's *Mystic Chords of Memory* discusses how both artifacts and locations feed into the mythologization of history, an alternate but not unrelated consideration of the consequences of what Bellah refers to as "civil religion." Kammen notes that reconciliation played a central role in codifying the heroic mythos that comes to be associated with the Civil War. See: Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

the Gettysburg Address as an ethical indictment of America's relationship with race. Although questions regarding Gettysburg as a part of American civil religion are beyond the scope of consideration, this project is informed by this scholarship, as Gettysburg's status as a sacred site is central to understanding the significance of African American abandonment of the site.

The second historiographical theme of this project involves African American emancipation celebrations. Although historical studies devoted to emancipation festivities are few in number, they are nonetheless valuable. The first book-length treatment of emancipation celebrations and their identity-forming significance was William Wiggins, Jr.'s *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations*.¹⁰ Wiggins' strength is on the pre-Civil War origins of freedom commemorations, and provides an in-depth examination of the various forms these celebrations took. These details prove important, as both Wiggins and later studies subsequently show that these early festivities set the model for Freedom Day celebrations following emancipation. Additionally, several scholars have explored these festivals through a regional lens. These more focused studies provide points of comparison, as localized fetes may have unique manifestations of black commemoration ceremonies.¹¹ The insight provided by these explorations is useful even though none of them consider Pennsylvania or the Gettysburg-area, as the more relaxed excursions to Gettysburg do not match the typically-structured parades and speeches of most emancipation celebrations.

¹⁰ William H. Wiggins, Jr., *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987).

¹¹ John R. McKivigan and Jason H. Silverman, "Monarchial Liberty and Republican Slavery: West Indies Emancipation Celebrations in Upstate New York and Canada West," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 10, no. 1 (1986): 7-18; William H. Wiggins, Jr. and Douglas DeNatale, eds. *Jubilation! African American Celebrations in the Southeast* (Columbia, South Carolina: McKissick Museum, University of South Carolina, 1993).

The other major treatment of African American emancipation celebrations is *Festivals of Freedom*, by Mitch Kachun.¹² Tracing the history of African American folk festivals commemorating freedom from, and resistance to, slavery and racial discrimination from the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1808 through the fiftieth anniversary of emancipation in 1915, Kachun argues that blacks used these occasions to construct a cultural identity. This process was not easy, however, as it was met with both white resistance and division within black communities. Although largely a cultural history, the complex nature of the topic ensures that the book “must necessarily blur the lines of political, cultural, social, and intellectual history,” a feat accomplished through the utilization of religious sermons, political speeches, and newspaper editorials.¹³ Moreover, Kachun’s study examines the debates within black political, religious, and social groups to determine the appropriate ways to commemorate black freedom, as well as internal divisions over the efficacy of such celebrations. Of particular value is Kachun’s exploration of the internal debates that black communities held over the viability, appropriateness, and meaning of these celebrations, which sheds light on the decline of these commemorative events, in addition to providing a point of comparison with which to analyze the Gettysburg-area festivities.

Finally, the third thematic element of this research project concerns the history of leisure from the Gilded Age through the Progressive Era. The historiography of American leisure pursuits and the entertainment industry is well-established. Unsurprisingly, a significant portion

¹² Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003). Geneviève Fabre agrees with Kachun’s findings in short summarization of black emancipation commemorations. See: Geneviève Fabre, “African-American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century,” in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, edited by Geneviève Fabre and Robert O’Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹³ Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 3.

of the scholarship has been focused on the rise of Walt Disney's entertainment empire, exploring how the Disney model transformed the American leisure experience. Another, more relevant body of literature has focused upon earlier trends in leisure in the United States. Numerous scholarly studies have examined amusements at the turn of the twentieth century, focusing particularly on the rise of an ideology of leisure and attempts by white Progressive reformers to construct and control urban, white, working-class leisure activities.

As Progressive reform was typically the purview of the middle- and upper-class activist, many of these works focus on the class-inflected nature of turn-of-the-century entertainment. Furthermore, these studies illuminate how leisure pursuits were incorporated into social initiatives that stressed cultural activities that emphasized temperance, self-improvement, environmentalism, and moral quality, all of which were considered means through which urban workers, trapped in deleterious city slums, could enrich their lives. While Helen Meller's *Leisure and the Changing City* examines Bristol, England, Paul Boyer's *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America* is more comprehensive, surveying leisure reform in several American cities.¹⁴ Both authors agree that reform attempts to shift the working class away from drinking and street entertainment was more than a program of hygiene and social uplift, but also was conducted in the hopes of fostering social harmony and allaying the ever-present fears of class warfare. Similarly, both Roy Rosenzweig's study of working-class amusements in Worcester, Massachusetts, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, and Perry Duis' *The Saloon*, which explores Boston and Chicago, reveal the measures that Progressive reformers took to control working-

¹⁴ Helen Elizabeth Meller, *Leisure and the Changing City, 1870-1914* (London: Routledge, 1976); Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978).

class leisure, particularly the drinking culture that had become dominant.¹⁵ Each of these works reflect the forms of leisure found in the Gettysburg-area recreation parks, and also reveal an intriguing twist to the traditional narrative of leisure reform-based class struggle. Whereas previous studies, such as Rosenzweig's and Duis', illuminate the actions of white reformers seeking to change leisure behaviors by taking control of local businesses, at Gettysburg, black reformers of Baltimore have no agency with which to affect the white-owned establishments. Therefore, the only recourse was to attempt to dictate the behaviors of working-class African Americans, mostly through moral suasion and fiduciary management of leisure excursions.

Meanwhile, some scholars have focused on the creation of a commercialized entertainment industry, one that, rather than serving a moral reform agenda, catered to all classes and offered family-friendly amusements. John Kasson and Richard Butsch both explore the rise of New York's Coney Island and other similarly-modeled amusement parks as primarily profit-making enterprises which appealed to the consumer due to being free from the moralistic platforms of the reformers, a trend that appears similar to the entertainments found at Round Top Park, even though Gettysburg promised a more provincial setting compared to the larger and glitzier productions.¹⁶

Lastly, a more recent trend in scholarship has been to study leisure through intersectional lenses, illuminating the turn-of-the-century experiences of previously-neglected constituencies. Kathy Peiss' *Cheap Amusements*, for example, examines the exploits of young,

¹⁵ Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983); Perry R. Duis, *The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston, 1886-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

¹⁶ John Kasson, *Amusing the Millions: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978); Richard Butsch, ed., *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

white, working-class women in New York City as they sought to leverage their new-found economic freedoms in an age of relaxing sexual mores, while attempting to assuage the ever-present spectre of respectability.¹⁷ Alternately, two studies focus upon African American leisure pursuits, in Philadelphia and Baltimore, respectively.¹⁸ In the end, both studies reach similar conclusions regarding the appearance of a distinctly black leisure culture in the 1890s, one that featured black-owned establishments infused with music and dance from African American folk traditions. Moreover, by 1920, a black social sphere, concomitant with a commercialized entertainment industry, had fully emerged. These studies' findings correspond with the abandonment of African American excursions to the Gettysburg-area recreation facilities, all of which were white-owned and operated, and were subject to highly racialized amusements.

Collectively, this body of literature both grounds and guides this study while also providing an avenue for historiographical discourse. The historiographies of leisure and African American emancipation celebrations each serve this project in complementary ways, as points of comparison and lenses through which to view the festivities held in the Gettysburg area. For example, although the festivities at Round Top Park and other Gettysburg-area leisure gardens were significantly smaller and more provincial than other entertainments of the age, similar entertainments and activities are present. This suggests a continuity, in that the appearance of amusement parks near Gettysburg were the result of an entrepreneurial spirit drawing upon

¹⁷ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

¹⁸ Brian E. Alnutt, "African-American Amusement and Recreation in Philadelphia, 1876-1926" (PhD diss., Lehigh University, 2003); Joseph R. Coates, Jr., "Recreation and Sport in the African-American Community of Baltimore, 1890-1920" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1991).

the growth of tourism thanks to the battlefield's significance. Additionally, the combination of both areas of study helps to provide clarity as to how to judge the African American excursions to Round Top Park, especially since the typical emancipation celebration was localized and a cultural product of the black community, albeit often under the careful gaze of white authorities. With Gettysburg, however, the Baltimore African American community eschewed the traditional freedom jubilee in favor of traveling to a site worthy of commemoration, even though they were subject to the whims of white leisure activities.

Understanding the nature of black America's relationship with Gettysburg is significant, as it fills in gaps in the scholarship as well as provides a more complete picture of the histories of commemoration, leisure, and race relations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. First, most accounts of historical memory and the commemoration of America's heritage have largely been whitewashed – it is the story of how white values have been elevated as the values of all Americans. Gettysburg and its battlefield, as one of the premier cultural institutions in the United States, has played a central role in this process of memorialization, and the absence of black visitation at the site is telling. Furthermore, most studies of leisure pursuits of the period are equally monochromatic, focused on white communities and constituencies. Both the general exclusion of African Americans from these studies, as well as the fallacious assumption that white interests were accepted by blacks as the only viable form of entertainment available, are equally problematic and distort the historical record. Lastly, African American excursions to Gettysburg – and their subsequent desertion of the space – are tied to the larger narrative of race relations in the post-Reconstruction era. Neither part of the Jim Crow South nor a cosmopolitan Northern city, Gettysburg represented

the rural North, and its inhabitants' attitudes towards African Americans reflected a growing animosity towards the perceived incursion of non-whites into traditionally white landscapes. In one way or another, a study of African Americans at Gettysburg partially addresses each of these gaps in the historical scholarship.

To this end, the most valuable and accessible sources in understanding African American excursions to Gettysburg are regional newspapers, especially the *Baltimore Afro-American* (colloquially known as *The Afro*), which began circulation in 1892, and the *Ledger* (which merged with the former in 1900 to become the *Afro-American Ledger*). Together, these papers quickly established themselves as the most trusted sources amongst the city's black community. In Gettysburg and the surrounding region, several local newspapers were in operation during the decades of study, including the *Gettysburg Star and Sentinel* (1867-1953), the *Gettysburg Compiler* (1857-1950), and the *Adams County News* (1908-1917). Each periodical illuminates the scope and tenor of their respective community's engagement with heritage tourists at Gettysburg. As a cultural study seeking to inject considerations of race into the intersection of commemoration and working class leisure, the regional print media reveals local perceptions of race, including discrimination, fears of intrusion, as well as concerns over community identity. For Baltimore African Americans, much of the discourse over the nature of emancipation commemorations, as well as the appropriateness of Gettysburg excursions, involved a public discourse between community leadership and newspaper editors. Meanwhile, in Adams County, Pennsylvania, the news media reported on the attractions at Gettysburg, the influx of African American visitors, and the concomitant rise in racial acrimony that these excursions generated amongst the local white population. In this way, much of the changing

relationship between the Gettysburg battlefield and regional blacks can be gleaned from the brief snippets of everyday life found in these newspapers.

“An Anniversary of Grateful Expression:” Emancipation Celebrations and Black Identity

The relationship between Gettysburg and African Americans is intertwined with the changing meaning of the park itself. The thread that ties the site to emancipation is rooted in both the fighting that took place there and the consecration of the battlefield as a sacred space by President Abraham Lincoln. On November 19, 1863, at the dedication of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Lincoln spoke of the future. Tasking the American people to continue the “unfinished work” of the dead, he challenged the nation to envision a “new birth of freedom,” one which was “dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”¹⁹ Lincoln understood that once the fighting had ceased, the real conflict would begin in earnest – a struggle over the status of African Americans in the United States.

Earlier in 1863, Lincoln had doubled-down on the motivation behind the war when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and, in a single stroke, changed the legal status of more than three million enslaved persons from “slave” to “free.” By binding the defeat of the Confederacy to the crusade to end slavery, the President charted a course for the future of American history, a path clearly defined in the Gettysburg Address. By 1863, African American soldiers were killing and dying for their freedom as the face of an army of liberation, and many blacks believed that fighting in Union armies justified their right to equal protection under the law and an equal stake in American society. The experiences of African American soldiers are

¹⁹ Abraham Lincoln, *Gettysburg Address*, November 19, 1863.

well-documented, including their motivations for fighting, their feelings about the war, and the prejudices and discriminations they faced from both Union and Confederate soldiers.²⁰ As Drew Gilpin Faust explains, for many black soldiers, “to take arms” against slavery “was by definition an act of self-defense, an assertion of manhood and a claim for personal liberation.”²¹ African Americans eagerly fought for “‘God, race and country’ – for righteousness, equality, and citizenship”; military service was “an act of personal empowerment and the vehicle of racial emancipation.”²² Black Civil War veterans would later hold a place of pride in local black communities, and often served as vanguards of efforts to cultivate moments, sites, and events of African American significance, whether through individual action or through veterans organizations such as the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR).²³

At the same time, President Lincoln, and the site at which his Address was given, became sacred to African Americans. For example, although Frederick Douglass criticized Abraham Lincoln as “preeminently the white man’s President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men,” he still acknowledged “the exalted character and great works of...the first martyr President of the United States.”²⁴ Even today, Lincoln, the Emancipation Proclamation,

²⁰ For one such example, see: Ira Berlin et al, eds., *Freedom’s Soldiers: The Black Military Experience in the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 48.

²² *Ibid.*, 53, 55.

²³ The elevation of black veterans to racial exemplars goes back to at least the 1850s, with the publication of William Nell’s *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston: 1855). For more on the central role that black veterans have played in the creation of an African American cultural identity, see David W. Blight, “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for American Historical Memory,” and Geneviève Fabre, “African American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century,” both in Geneviève Fabre and Robert O’Meally, eds., *History and Memory in African American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For a more specific example, see: Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

²⁴ Frederick Douglass, *Oration by Frederick Douglass Delivered on the Occasion of the Unveiling of the Freedmen’s Monument in Memory of Abraham Lincoln* (Washington D.C.: Gibson Brothers, 1876), 4-5.

and the Gettysburg Address are forever linked in the minds of many Americans. Notably, while some see this trifecta as signifying “the distance the American people have traveled from the nightmarish reality of slavery,” others see a representation of “the distance that [has] yet to be traversed.”²⁵

The history and memory of slavery and emancipation endured in the lived experiences of both former slaves and the generations of black Americans born in the years following abolition. The meanings of freedom, and black people’s attempts to commemorate and celebrate emancipation took shape over the course of decades, and even then, it did not occur all at once – rather, endeavors to memorialize freedom took shape unevenly, haltingly, and at times incompletely, often mimicking the slow road to freedom itself.

In January 1955, an editorial in the *Atlanta Daily World*, an African American newspaper, provided context for a recent emancipation celebration, hinting at the deep significance of such events for African American identity:

Every year since the signing of [the Emancipation Proclamation], driving slavery from the shores of our country, there has been staged among our group some sort of an anniversary of grateful expression. Hardly any individual or specific organization can claim credit for the initiation of this practice, for it had its beginning among the early freedmen in every state involved in the slavery question.

The movement started in country churches, old schoolhouses and lodge rooms and from the Carolina lagoons across to where the great west started, the leaders of that day have staged celebrations meant to give vim and spirit to the new freedom that had come to our people.

Beginning at first as mere celebrations which rehearsed many incidents of torture and privations, these functions have taken on a new order. Turning from narrations of hard and bitter experiences in the memories of the slave, they

²⁵ For an exploration of the complex debate over Lincoln and the origins and meaning of the Emancipation Proclamation, see: Ira Berlin, “Who Freed the Slaves? Emancipation and Its Meaning,” in *Union & Emancipation: Essays on Politics and Race in the Civil War Era*, eds. David W. Blight and Brooks D. Simpson (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1997), 105-121.

have been those schools of citizenship and the training of a new group in the army of struggle for the realization of first-class citizenship for all people.²⁶

In fact, these comments were not hyperbole. Historically speaking, there is a correlative factor linking pre-emancipation slave celebrations with antebellum commemorative events. The first known such celebration was held on January 1, 1808, in honor of the abolition of the foreign slave trade in America. This event later became commingled with similar regional celebrations (for example, the 1827 termination of slavery in the state of New York, and the August, 1834 abolition of slavery in the British West Indies.)²⁷ As mentioned earlier, in 1857, Frederick Douglass, speaking at one such celebration, remarked upon the established tradition of freedom commemoration, and supported the continuation of such black-initiated memorials.²⁸ Like the editor of the *Atlanta Daily World*, Douglass saw a higher purpose in emancipation celebrations, one in which Mitch Kachun argues included “interpretations of history that equated human progress with the onward march of universal liberty,” and “carried with it a great humanizing tendency.” Furthermore, having these events organized and guided by black hands ensured that they held a “freedom-centered view of history,” rather than similar white-organized celebrations, which “[Frederick] Douglass pointedly characterized...[as] emanating from white Americans’ ‘dollar-loving hearts.’”²⁹

After the war ended, Emancipation Day celebrations took place on a variety of calendar dates that held significance for African Americans, effectively combining the earlier festivities

²⁶ “The Addresses of the ‘Emancipators,’” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 4, 1955.

²⁷ Wiggins, *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations*, xvii.

²⁸ Frederick Douglass, Speech at Canandaigua, New York, August 4, 1857 (Rochester, NY: CP Dewey, 1857), *Frederick Douglass Papers*, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mfd.21039/?st=gallery>.

²⁹ Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 95.

with Lincoln's 1863 Proclamation. Although festival days varied by community, the most prominent celebration days were: January 1, "Juneteenth" (June 19, accepted as the day word of the war's end reached Texas), April 16 (the date black Washingtonians accepted to be the anniversary of emancipation in the District of Columbia), and April 9 (popular amongst black Virginians as the day General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox).³⁰ Ultimately, the date chosen for commemoration was a local decision, and was less significant than the activities held to celebrate freedom.

By the late nineteenth century, emancipation celebrations had adapted some of the structural elements and cultural traditions of their slave-era forebears. Pre-war festivities were rooted in slave holidays, and featured feasting, dancing, singing, and most importantly, drinking.³¹ For example, Frederick Douglass recalled one such slave-era gala, noting that while some "sober, thinking and industrious ones of our number would employ themselves in making corn-brooms, mats, horse-collars, and baskets...by far the larger part engaged in such sports and merriments as playing ball, wrestling, running footraces, fiddling, dancing, and drinking whiskey."³² Post-emancipation celebrations featured similar activities as those detailed by Douglass, emphasizing music, dancing, and drinking. For example, during his cataloguing of freedom jubilees in the 1970s, William Wiggins noted the prevalence of dance competitions combined with excessive drinking. One participant in Alabama recalled that the evening's jitterbug dance competition was made more festive due to the presence of alcohol: "The

³⁰ Wiggins, *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations*, 134.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 25-27.

³² Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 64.

beverages ranged from red soda-pop...‘bootleg’ whiskey in fruit jars, and ‘home brew.’ I seem to recall an intoxicant that was not aged as long as ‘home-brew’; it was called ‘Sister-get-you-ready!’”³³

Ultimately, individual activities varied, but jubilees celebrated the black community and its heritage. Following emancipation, more formalized celebrations were organized which incorporated the exuberance of the slave-era fetes with more solemn elements. Parades featuring black musicians and led by black veterans frequently either inaugurated or marked the conclusion of emancipation celebrations, while ritual processions, speeches by prominent figures, and readings of the Emancipation Proclamation and other documents associated with abolition all became hallmarks of these occasions.³⁴ Still, a level of gaiety existed, and athletic events became increasingly popular by the latter decades of the 1800s, many of which featured regional entertainments. For example, Juneteenth celebrations in Texas frequently involved rodeos, calf-roping competitions, and horse races, while in the Northeast, games of the increasingly popular sport of baseball became a Freedom Day tradition.³⁵

Although emancipation celebrations would continue well into the next century, the turn of the twentieth century brought questions as to the efficacy and value of such jubilees. Many prominent African American communities, such as those in Washington and Baltimore, vigorously debated what Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer called the “propriety of continuing the tradition” of ritual celebrations, as they were “concerned about how the large public events and the attendees were perceived by white Americans.” For example, a planned

³³ Quoted in Wiggins, *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations*, 27.

³⁴ Wiggins, *O Freedom! Afro-American Emancipation Celebrations*, 36-48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

celebration in Washington on April 16, 1885, was cancelled amid disagreements over public perception and financial expenditure of the event.³⁶ To be sure, whites – especially Southern whites – were always hesitant to support black freedom celebrations, with reactions ranging from hushed concern to threats of violence, and a general sense of reticence was often enflamed to outright fear by proslavery elements who would cite freedom jubiliations in an attempt to stoke the flames of racial fear and a loss of white power in America.³⁷ For their part, black leaders caustically dismissed these accusations, often attributing such emotions to racial blindness. Such whites, Frederick Douglass argued, failed to comprehend that “to be one of a nation is more than to be one of the human family. He don’t live in the world but he lives in the United States. Into his little soul the thought of God as our common Father, and of man our common Brother has never entered. To such a soul as that, this celebration cannot but be exceedingly distasteful.”³⁸ This notion of a universal humanity, as well as the prospect of full civic participation, would continue to infuse emancipation celebrations across the country.

“A Favorite Resort to All:” Day-tripping at Gettysburg

Meanwhile, Gettysburg had become a site of excursion and celebration for the African American community of Baltimore in the years following the war, especially with the opening of Round Top Park and other nearby recreational venues in the 1880s. The emergence of Round

³⁶ Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 136.

³⁷ Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 94.

³⁸ Frederick Douglass, Speech at Canandaigua, New York, August 4, 1857. Many black leaders lauded Great Britain and other European powers that had abolished slavery for more closely observing the ideals of the American Revolution than the United States. See: John R. McKivigan and Jason H. Silverman, “Monarchical Liberty and Republican Slavery: West Indies Emancipation Celebrations in Upstate New York and Canada West,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 10, no. 1 (1986): 7-18.

Top Park and other similar entertainment venues appears to coincide with a late-nineteenth century shift towards Gettysburg as an attractive site for daytrip excursions. In the years immediately following the battle in 1863, the battlefield at Gettysburg became a curiosity for all manner of relic seekers, history aficionados, and spectators seeking to venerate the recently deceased. Once the initial sheen of the battle wore off, however, Gettysburg began to attract a genteel audience, seeking what Jim Weeks described as “a fusion of landscape and epic into a single providential event.” Between trips to mineral spas and picnics on the battlefield, these upper-class tourists, “like a medieval pilgrim,” sought to experience “the transcendent, the sublime, and the strange” all in the pastoral tranquility of rural Gettysburg.³⁹ By the 1880s, this phase of tourism would fade away with the construction of rail lines to the town, which opened the location to thousands of working- and middle-class tourists in search of entertainment and leisure.⁴⁰ As railcars pulled in to Gettysburg, one small trunk line – constructed solely for excursionists – wound its way through the park, ultimately terminating at Round Top Park, which opened on land owned by the Gettysburg & Harrisburg Railroad in 1884.⁴¹

Located a few miles south of town and beyond the control of the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association (GBMA) and other similar preservationist organizations, Round Top Park featured refreshment stands, a dancing pavilion, cook house, “Merry-Go-Round,” and occasionally other attractions, such as a shooting gallery, flying horses, and carnival performers.⁴² For decades, a working-class leisure industry had proliferated near urban areas,

³⁹ Jim Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 45, 52. See also: Patrick Click, *The Spirit of the Times: Amusements in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore, Norfolk, and Richmond* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 87-99.

⁴⁰ Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 86-89.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴² *Gettysburg Compiler*, June 28, 1887

centered on so-called “pleasure gardens,” sites that featured fireworks, dancing, and other forms of active and rowdy entertainment, a far cry from the serene naturalism of upper- and middle-class relaxation establishments that stressed moral advancement, communing with nature, and spiritual cleansing. Aware of this shift in leisure preferences, Gettysburg entrepreneurs obliged the crowds of incoming plebeians, with Round Top Park representing only the first in a series of amusement parks to appear in the area, while the electric railway served as a crucial conduit, shuttling expectant consumers between the regional rail system and local commercial entertainment venues.⁴³ In the years after the park’s opening, a number of other privately-owned entertainment venues sprung up nearby, frequently leasing land on the Gettysburg and Harrisburg Railroad line that wound through the battlefield, in an attempt to capitalize on the increasing popularity (and profitability) of the region as a daytrip destination.⁴⁴

As Gettysburg’s popularity as a vacation site grew, the railroads ensured that crowds of visitors arrived, sometimes by the thousands. For example, following an advertising push in Philadelphia newspapers, the railroads brought over 7,000 day-trippers one Sunday in 1884, while another such excursion, this time in 1915, brought over 3,000 tourists.⁴⁵ Railroads often promoted excursions to Gettysburg, as did the era’s fraternal and religious organizations. These groups, according to the historian Jim Weeks, “with Byzantine monikers such as the Improved

⁴³ Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 91.

⁴⁴ Although evidence is scant, it appears there were at least several other parks to appear in the years following the opening of Round Top Park, and it can be reasonably assumed due to their adjacent location and similar facilities that these parks served similar purposes. For example, Gettysburg’s *The Star and Sentinel* reported on July 2, 1902 that “Dr. E.D. Hudson has leased a plot of ground from the G. & H. Railway Company at Little Round Top and has fitted the same up as a park and has placed thereon a dancing floor for the use of excursion parties.” Additionally, Cunningham Grove was used for picnics as early as July 26, 1879 on land privately-owned by two sisters, Florence and Georgianna Cunningham (“Round About Town,” *Gettysburg Compiler*, April 20, 1904). Tipton Park and wheat-field Park are also referred to by local media around the same time.

⁴⁵ *Gettysburg Compiler*, July 28, 1884; *Adams County News*, October 23, 1915.

Order of Heptasophs or Knights of the Golden Eagle” could “obtain special rates from the railroad, sell excursion tickets at a higher fee, [and] then pocket the difference.”⁴⁶ For their part, Gettysburg businessmen suffered through a conflicted relationship with the influx of working-class tourists that were more concerned with personal enjoyment than observing the rules of propriety. Dismissively referred to as the “shoe-box” crowd for their tendency to daytrip while packing a lunch, local businessmen nevertheless appreciated the tourists’ dollars, even if they did express dismay at the rise in litter, vandalism, and alcohol-related incidents that were left in the visitors’ wake.⁴⁷ It is clear that the presence of urban invaders into rural Gettysburg—white and black—irked locals, but racial dynamics ensured that African American tourists were often singled out for engaging in similar behaviors to white visitors.

“As Merry as a Lot of Schoolchildren:” African Americans at Gettysburg

Regional African Americans were attracted to Gettysburg’s working class leisure venues too, with the first recorded instance of an all-black excursion comprised of “colored waiters” arriving from Baltimore on June 16, 1880.⁴⁸ Although lured in part by the variety of entertainments, visiting Gettysburg around the Juneteenth holiday suggests that the trip held a deeper cultural significance as well. Baltimore, the nineteenth-century’s “black capital,” boasted an African American community numbering over 80,000 by 1900, and as such had developed a number of black-owned leisure establishments.⁴⁹ Most were centered around a

⁴⁶ Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 91.

⁴⁷ *Gettysburg Star and Sentinel*, May 31, 1887; November 8, 1887.

⁴⁸ *Gettysburg Star and Sentinel*, June 17, 1880.

⁴⁹ United States Decennial Survey, 1900, Social Explorer Dataset, digitally transcribed by Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, accessed March 28, 2017, www.socialexplorer.com.

working-class drinking culture, however, and the existence of these saloons, brothels, and gambling dens were frowned upon by the black community's leadership, not to mention its middle- and upper-class black benevolent societies and church groups. Seeking to sponsor leisure excursions that focused more on self-improvement, moral uplift, and racial pride, groups as varied as the local posts of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) and upper class social clubs such as Baltimore's Primrose Social and Delmonico Circle viewed Gettysburg and Round Top Park as an ideal destination to escape the clutter and chaos of the big city.⁵⁰ In particular, Baltimore's black GAR posts were instrumental in promoting Gettysburg excursions, and had been sponsoring an annual trip since shortly after the war. Like other GAR groups nationwide, Baltimore's black posts had surged in size in the postwar years, and their trips to Gettysburg proved incredibly popular throughout the 1880s and 1890s, with some daytrips involving thousands of black Baltimoreans.⁵¹

Unfortunately, Baltimore's black leaders would come to be disappointed by the reality of Gettysburg's entertainment options. It was not uncommon to find that many of the amusements offered at the white-owned and -operated venues served to reinforce racial stereotypes and tropes. "Coon dunks," "free watermelon days," and other such entertainments came at the expense of blacks, and white tourists enjoyed ridiculing black behavior, mannerisms, and drunkenness. Even special events were racially charged, such as a watermelon-eating contest for blacks held in 1899 that drew crowds of white spectators.⁵²

⁵⁰ Patrick Click, *The Spirit of the Times: Amusements in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore, Norfolk, and Richmond* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 82, 102; Leroy Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1982), 280-284.

⁵¹ Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 94.

⁵² *Gettysburg Star and Sentinel*, August 15, 1899; *Gettysburg Star and Sentinel*, September 5, 1899.

David Nasaw noted that it was common practice for early twentieth-century amusement parks to segregate visitors, admitting blacks and whites on alternate days.⁵³ It is unclear if this was also the typical protocol for the Gettysburg leisure gardens, but the presence of white spectators at an event organized for black tourists suggests that the white entrepreneurs at Gettysburg sought to leverage racial animosities and stereotypes for financial gain. Regardless of whether this would prove humiliating for the black tourist, it came at little cost to the park owner, as the railroad unloaded car after car of fresh tourists daily.

Compared to cosmopolitan Baltimore, with its large community of African Americans, black visitors to small-town Gettysburg would have been a rare spectacle. Although statistics for Gettysburg itself do not exist, data for Adams County is equally stark: in 1900, only 115 of the county's 34,496 residents were black.⁵⁴ Given this lack of racial diversity, it is not surprising that the sight of large crowds of blacks descending upon their community would be received with apprehension and even fear by many locals. Moreover, African American visitors who left Round Top Park to venture into town to patronize stores and bars faced unsympathetic and often outright hostile townspeople. While occasionally characterized in kind terms, more likely than not the local press censured the black day-trippers with accusations of debauchery and licentiousness, including incidents of gambling, knife fights, public urination, and a rash of pickpocketing. The behavior of black women was of particular note, and allegations of disreputable behavior by women were called out by the local press for being especially

⁵³ David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 92-93.

⁵⁴ United States Decennial Survey, 1900, Social Explorer Dataset, digitally transcribed by Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, accessed March 28, 2017, www.socialexplorer.com.

repulsive to white sensibilities. In one instance, the *Adams County News* scolded the “Negros [for their] antics,” but singled out women, chiding that “to see a drunken woman planted in the middle of Center Square half clad and wallering [*sic*] in the mud, is not [just] pitiful, but about the most disgusting exhibition that any person would care look upon.”⁵⁵ By 1914, the mere hint of a crowd of black tourists caused distressed locals to summon state law enforcement officers in the hopes of controlling black behavior.⁵⁶

Meanwhile, racial antagonism in Gettysburg was met with growing discomfort amongst Baltimore’s black community. Although civic leaders initially encouraged such excursions as a means to “elevate the race,” by the 1890s, both the black press and black institutions had begun to condemn daytrip celebrations as a waste of resources and an excuse for licentiousness. In 1899, *The Ledger* lamented the loss of millions of dollars for excursions, “to say nothing of the many fights, police court scrapes, broken limbs, and the character of girls who have been ruined on these excursions, together with the demoralizing effect in general.”⁵⁷ Calls for a cessation of such festivities became more frequent, with black progressives arguing that such adventures not only failed to uplift blacks, but actually impeded their advancement, while a group of Baltimore’s African Methodist Episcopal ministers in 1905 lambasted daytrips to Gettysburg, stating that “excursions heretofore given for and by our people have not been conducive to their moral improvement.”⁵⁸ Financial waste without social gain seems to stand at the center of most complaints about excursions and celebrations. For example, a GAR-

⁵⁵ *Adams County News*, September 18, 1909.

⁵⁶ Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 96.

⁵⁷ *The Ledger*, July 15, 1899.

⁵⁸ *Afro-American Ledger*, July 20, 1905.

sponsored daytrip in 1903 brought seventy-four coaches to Gettysburg and cost an estimated ten thousand dollars, but was castigated by the *Afro-American Ledger* as a foolish waste that returned little to the black community: “Can we afford such extravagance as to spend [so much] for one day’s pleasure? We think not.”⁵⁹

“The Quarrel Forgotten:” Reconciliation and Abandonment

The heyday of working-class leisure parks at Gettysburg was brief, as Round Top Park was ultimately sold to the GBMA in 1896, whereupon they removed many of the facilities, including the “dancing pavilion and cook house,” while these and other amusement parks gradually fell out of use over the course of the next decade.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, it is clear that emancipation celebrations and festive excursions were also falling out of favor with black civic leadership at the same time, in part due to increasing levels of late-nineteenth-century racial acrimony. The rise of legalized segregation in the form of Jim Crow laws and the concurrent restriction of African American access to public spaces like parade grounds and parks adversely affected black attempts to commemorate emancipation, even in the North.⁶¹ Similarly, concerns over the behavior of some festival-goers were equally worrying. Leading the charge, the *Afro-American Ledger* reflected on the lasting effects of the celebrants bad behavior, commenting that “it is quite true that many excursionists feel that an outing is a signal for all kinds of mischief, and it is not an enjoyable occasion unless they ‘let themselves go.’”⁶² Even

⁵⁹ *Afro-American Ledger*, September 19, 1903.

⁶⁰ “Town and Country,” *New Oxford Item*, November 13, 1896.

⁶¹ Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 237.

⁶² *Afro-American Ledger*, September 2, 1916.

more, the paper understood the repercussions that such action could have for the black community as a whole, noting that what the excursionists failed to grasp was that “good behavior will gain for us what voting never can secure.”⁶³

Furthermore, an era of white vigilantism, violence, and racially-motivated discrimination appears to have tempered enthusiasm for such festivities in black communities across the country.⁶⁴ In Gettysburg, one historian addressed the tenor of town, noting that the town’s Democrat-aligned newspaper “continually stirred racial animosity, and townspeople showed little sympathy for black equality.”⁶⁵ In the end, black leaders encouraged their fellow African Americans to look to the future and focus on activities that contributed to the social and economic advancement of the race, instead of looking backwards towards slavery, a topic closely associated with their degradation and humiliation.⁶⁶ In this environment, a combination of racial discrimination, scenes of public spectacle, and black leaders’ increasing skepticism as to the value of such excursions all served to reduce the appeal of Gettysburg daytrips for African Americans.

Lastly, the early 1900s marked an evolution in the meaning of the Battle of Gettysburg, as the sacred significance of the military park shifted away from a focus on its association with emancipation and freedom. Whereas in 1863, Lincoln spoke of a “new birth of freedom” and

⁶³ *Afro-American Ledger*, June 27, 1914.

⁶⁴ Part of this can be explained by the state of race relations in the decades during and after Reconstruction. The literature of Reconstruction and racial conflict is deep and well-established. For example, see Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981); Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005); Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); and Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁶⁵ Weeks, *Gettysburg: Memory, Market, and an American Shrine*, 94.

⁶⁶ Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 245.

challenged Americans to continue the struggle for true equality, the fiftieth anniversary of the battle was marked by an entirely different message. In contrast to Lincoln's lofty ideals and passionate charges, President Woodrow Wilson, speaking to an invited crowd on July 4, 1913, professed it an "impertinence to discourse upon how the battle went, how it ended." Rather than questioning "what it signified," Wilson encouraged the audience to contemplate the "maturity and might" of the nation. Characterizing the war as "battles long past" and "the quarrel forgotten," he cleansed the war of the odor of divisiveness, stating that "we shall not forget the splendid valor, the manly devotion of the men then arrayed against one another, now grasping hands and smiling into each other's eyes. How complete the union has become and how dear to all of us, how unquestioned, how benign and majestic...our great family of free men!"⁶⁷ It is telling that although the neighboring communities of Carlisle and Chambersburg had active posts of the GAR at the time, the planners of the 1913 reunion did not invite surviving black veterans. Although photographs of the seventy-fifth anniversary reunion of the battle in 1938 do attest to the presence of some black veterans, even today, few of the park's monuments bear witness to the sacrifices of African Americans.⁶⁸

Indeed, by the time of Wilson's address, the tide had turned and the Gettysburg battlefield, like so much else concerning the Civil War, had been co-opted by the national spirit of reconciliation that sought to divest the conflict of any larger racial significance in the interests of unification.⁶⁹ Born amidst harsh Reconstruction-era policies that were criticized for

⁶⁷ Woodrow Wilson, "Address at the Gettysburg," July 4, 1913, *The American Presidency Project*, eds. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, accessed March 30, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=65370>.

⁶⁸ James M. Paradis, *African Americans and the Gettysburg Campaign* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005), 78-79.

⁶⁹ Wilson's agency in this process, as well as his position on race, have been continually debated by historians. He clearly defended the racial hierarchy, but whether he was a rabid southern segregationist or a

exacting punitive justice against the South and was focused on the immorality of slavery, proponents of reconciliation comprised an alliance of both sides who alternately sought to salve lingering factional hostilities while restoring the nobility of the former Confederacy.⁷⁰ For Southerners, as well as their sympathetic allies, chief amongst this revisionist ideology was the mythology of the Lost Cause, the idea that Confederate soldiers had fought the “good fight,” honorable and bravely as true gentlemen. Additionally, it was not that the South had been defeated, but that, in the face of insurmountable odds due to a host of economic and logistical inadequacies, they were destined to lose. As a justification for defeat, slavery and the plight of African Americans were necessarily and unceremoniously minimized as both a cause, catalyst, and moral imperative of the war.⁷¹ Across the country, at Gettysburg and other Civil War-era sites, reconciliation proved to have lasting appeal, as few white Americans were eager to face the realities of race, while their black counterparts had little agency with which to challenge this program of ideological repurposing.

Ultimately, the abandonment of Gettysburg as a site of African American memorialization and pilgrimage at the turn of the twentieth century was shaped by a combination of factors over the course of several years. For years, blacks from Baltimore and other regional urban centers had marked Gettysburg as a sacred space, and associated the

Progressive reformer who believed segregation to be a necessary precondition for social stability is an open question. On Wilson and race, see: Eric Yellin, *Racism in the Nation's Service: Government Workers and the Color Line in Woodrow Wilson's America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), and Edmund Fong, “Reconstructing the “Problem” of Race,” *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (December 2008): 660-670. On the role of the presidency in shaping American society, see: Mary E. Stuckey, *Defining Americans: The Presidency and National Identity* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

⁷⁰ See: Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 98-139; and Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 162-186.

⁷¹ Janney, *Remembering the Civil War*, 133-159.

battlefield with both the martial valor of the Civil War's Colored Regiments as well as a defining step in the long road to freedom. By the 1880s, this cultural significance, combined with the advent of cheap rail travel and the appearance of a slew of commercial entertainment venues – chief among them Round Top Park – ensured that Gettysburg became a premier destination for African American leisure excursions. Unfortunately, growing racial acrimony between the white locals and the throngs of black tourists, as well as black civic leadership's growing skepticism of the cultural and moral value of these types of vacations, tempered enthusiasm for the organization and funding of day trips to Gettysburg. Instead, Baltimore's black community would be encouraged to stay at home, patronize black-owned leisure establishments, and participate in events choreographed towards moral improvement and racial uplift. At the same time, the meaning of the Gettysburg site was going through its own transformation, advanced by both local interests and a national trend towards reconfiguring the historical memory of the Civil War. Gone would be the working-class leisure gardens, to be replaced by programs and exhibits that mythologized the battlefield, solemnly stressing martial valor, Lost Cause ideology, and a unified brotherhood, at the expense of considerations of race and the moral quagmire of slavery. In the end, by the early twentieth century, African Americans consciously devalued Gettysburg as a site of leisure and pilgrimage, simply because the battlefield itself no longer represented a place worthy of memorialization for their racial identity. More recent reinterpretations of the Gettysburg park have reinserted slavery as a central theme of the 1863 events, but one could argue that this was too little, too late. By that time, black Americans had already created their own cultural identity, laden with the sacred memory of sites, events, and

persons of their own choosing, as well as a racial heritage that simply no longer needed
Gettysburg.