National Parks for New Audiences

Diversifying Interpretation for Enhanced Contemporary Relevance

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ABSTRACT: Changing sociocultural and historiographic contexts require new approaches to interpretation and presentation at National Park Service–administered sites. Through the study of two NPS parks in Washington State (San Juan Island National Historical Park and Whitman Mission National Historic Site), this article explores the agency's interpretive programs and practices in relation to founding mandates and contemporary relevance. As demonstrated by these case studies, efforts to expand programming and presentations within the NPS system are ongoing but at present insufficient in light of current changes in demographics and visitation. Ultimately, for the NPS to remain relevant in the twenty-first century it must respect founding mandates but diversify interpretation of its parks' contested histories, thereby enhancing its contemporary relevance and better engaging today's audiences.

KEY WORDS: National Park Service, founding mandate, site interpretation, contested history, diversity

Introduction

As US demographics continue to shift, so have the interpretive approaches of the US National Park Service (NPS), which in 2016—its centennial year—stewards more than four hundred historic properties nationwide and last year alone hosted over 305 million visitors.[1] The agency has responded to changing interests among diversifying audiences and to declining visitation at many of its parks through various campaigns intended to redefine, broaden, and reinforce its significance and appeal. In the words of its former director, Fran Mainella, the NPS is "an institution with a unique and vital role to play in telling America's story and nurturing an informed citizenry—a mission of high national purpose."[2] As such,

1 National Park Service, NPS Stats website, "Annual Recreation Visitation by Park Type or Region for: 2015," https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/; and Glenn Nelson, "More NPS Attendance Marks Fall," *The Trail Posse*, January 5, 2016, http://trailposse.com/2016/01/national-parks-2015-top-20/.

2 Fran Mainella quoted in Nora Mitchell et al., eds., *Keeping National Parks Relevant in the 21st Century* (Woodstock, VT: Conservation Study Institute, 2006), v.

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the NPS must engage in the deliberate revaluation and rearticulation of its goals and achievements in order to maintain its position as the nation's premier natural and cultural resource management organization.[3] The agency's future depends in no small part on the validity of its interpretation and presentation approaches, and it acknowledges that relevance is best sustained by a system that "includes all the stories of heritage that define this country."[4] Although in recent years the NPS has made significant strides toward increased inclusivity and more diverse interpretive programming, much work remains to be done to ensure that its parks remain attractive and meaningful to new audiences well into its second century. NPS properties, maintained to preserve aspects of American history and identity and to educate visitors, must therefore change their interpretive programs to be more inclusive of all their contributors and constituents. The historic interpretation and presentation potential of smaller and lesser-known NPS units, which are typically overshadowed by the nation's increasingly popular flagship wilderness parks, render them venues for more nuanced and comprehensive interpretive techniques.[5] Such advancements could substantially improve users' experiences. Diversity in staffing at the agency, which like park visitation remains disproportionately white, also presents avenues for engaging historically marginalized groups. Including voices of those underrepresented in policy and decision making remains critical to convincing visitors, especially from marginalized groups, that the NPS is committed to both diversity and equity, and to better conveying to all visitors the full richness of American cultural history.

Through the study of two NPS parks in the state of Washington—chosen for their similarly isolated and diminutive sizes, as well as their engagement of complementary issues related to national identity, colonialist expansion, and frontier conflicts—this article explores areas of potential growth and diversification in NPS interpretive programming and practices with potential relevance nationwide. Whitman Mission National Historic Site (WM-NHS) commemorates the 1847 murder of the missionary Whitman family by a group of Cayuse and Umatilla Native

3 Conflicts between natural resource preservation and the exploitation of resources inherent in the NPS foundational mandate have been explored by several scholars, including John Lemons, "Revisiting the Meaning and Purpose of the 'National Park Service Organic Act,'" *Environmental Management* 46 (June 2010): 81–90.

4 Mitchell et al., *Keeping National Parks*, 6. On efforts to increase civic engagement and "the development of a more expansive and complex national historic landscape" at the NPS in the early 2000s, see Edward Linenthal, "The National Park Service and Civic Engagement," *The Public Historian* 28 no. 1 (February 2006): 123–29.

5 The NPS classifies park properties into seventeen typologies, including National Park, National Battlefield, National Historic Site, National Monument, National Lakeshore, and others. History- and heritage-based parks welcomed 37.55 percent of 2015's NPS visitors. The larger, wilderness-based parks tend to dominate in terms of attendance. For example, the three most popular NPS parks in 2015 were the Blue Ridge Parkway with over 15 million visitors, Golden Gate National Recreation Area with just under 15 million visitors, and Great Smoky Mountains National Park with just over 10.6 million that same year. NPS Stats website, "Annual Park Ranking Report for Recreation Visitors in: 2015," https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/.

Americans. Farther north, San Juan Island National Historical Park (SJI-NHP) memorializes the so-called "Pig War" between the United States and Great Britain, a boundary dispute marked by years of stalemate that was ultimately resolved through peaceful arbitration in 1872. Each case presents missed opportunities to more critically explore and examine themes of substantial contemporary relevance to multiculturalism and international diplomacy. At the same time, the NPS recognizes that today's visitors expect more age- and culture-appropriate information from their national parks and would like it delivered in "interactive and personalized" ways.[6] To meet these changing expectations, the NPS and individual properties have been reevaluating interpretive programs and delivery mechanisms with an interest in sustaining relevance into the twenty-first century, while at the same time operating within the frameworks of legally binding foundational mandates.

Park Foundational Mandates and Interpretative Priorities

The precise mandates for NPS properties are derived explicitly from their congressional enactment legislation. For example, in 1936 Congress prescribed a "public national memorial to Marcus Whitman and his wife" at WM-NHS.[7] In 1966 it tasked the NPS at SJI-NHP with "interpreting and preserving the sites of the American and English camps on the island" and "commemorating the historic events that occurred from 1853 to 1871."[8] As with other NPS parks, both units were intended to commemorate specific historic events, but also to demonstrate their connection to the settlement and "civilization" of the American West. Absent from many legal mandates is explicit concern for natural habitats, common among larger flagship natural resource parks such as Yellowstone or Yosemite, or for related Native American histories and perspectives. Events that have recently been recognized as important aspects of parks' identities yielding opportunities for informing multiple histories continue to be excluded from park programming because, in part, they had originally been dismissed as irrelevant. The literal interpretation of properties' founding mandates has thus in the past limited their full interpretive potential and compromised their contemporary relevance.

Still, in light of changing public history practices, interpretive goals, and audiences, the NPS has started repositioning some of its properties by engaging their complex contexts and multiple (and conflicting) histories. A challenging—and at times controversial—task, it is made more difficult because for legal reasons this must be done without straying too far from founding mandates. The NPS relies on "on-site" interpretation as a primary means through which it shares these stories with visitors, recognizing that while "many historical parks have aesthetic appeal

6 James Gramann, *Trends in Demographics and Information Technology Affecting Visitor Center Use: Focus Group Report* (NPS Social Science Program, July 2003), 2, https://www.nature.nps.gov/socialscience/docs/NPS_Inf_Tech_Report.pdf.

7 H. R. No. 7736, 1936, US Public Law 840.

8 US Public Law 89–565, approved September 9, 1966.

and some accommodate active recreation, few can be greatly appreciated without some explanation of who lived or what occurred there."[9] Professional interpretation thus remains the agency's most potentially dynamic instructive tool. Having commenced employing trained public historians in the early 1930s, the NPS continues to operate in accordance with the mantra articulated by its director of research and education, Verne Chatelain, who in 1936 noted that:

> There is no more effective way of teaching history to the average American than to take him to the site on which some great historic event has occurred, and there to give him an understanding and feeling of that event through the medium of contact with the site itself, and the story that goes along with it.[10]

This explicit focus on the "average American" (rather than the elite historian or academic) not only at the time opened NPS historians up to charges of subprofessional standards, but also influenced the tenor and content of interpretive programs that were geared toward a broad (and sometimes nationalistic) appeal.[11] This interest in conveying "understanding and feeling" allowed a degree of flexibility for park staff looking to enhance visitors' experience of their parks. Indeed, the NPS continues to view interpretation, as defined by Freeman Tilden in his landmark work on the subject, "as an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."[12] However, the degree to which sites' complexity is meaningfully engaged remains debatable. The act of justifying a park's raison d'être, which can sometimes overemphasize its significance, necessitates constant reaffirmation to sustain legitimacy, either through the repetition of existing programs and narratives or by creating new ones.

In response to changing demographics and public interests, the NPS has argued that its ultimate mission—to "preserve . . . unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations"—remains relevant today.[13] At the same time the agency recognizes the need to expand its interpretive approaches to incorporate different cultural groups. Indeed, in 2006 it acknowledged that relevance is ideally sustained through a park system that incorporates a diversity of cultural perspectives that are "interwoven . . . to create a bold, truthful narrative" meaningful to the "many people and many cultural groups [that] tell their own stories."[14] The potential discomfort caused by "challenging topics" engaged through "the process of openness and honesty" has been presented by the NPS as an

9 Barry Mackintosh, "The National Park Service Moves into Historical Interpretation," *The Public Historian* 9 no. 2 (May 1987): 51.

10 Verne Chatelain quoted in Mackintosh, "National Park Service," 55.

11 Mackintosh, "National Park Service," 55–56.

12 Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007), 33.

13 National Park Service, NPS website, "About Us," http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/index.htm.

14 Mitchell et al., *Keeping National Parks*, 6.

important aspect of necessary national dialogues.[15] The agency's willingness to address these issues directly is noteworthy. At WM-NHS and SJI-NHP one can experience and assess progress towards sustaining and enhancing relevance in small western parks, which are often overlooked by both scholars and visitors.

Whitman Mission National Historic Site

The Whitman family's Presbyterian mission, originally sponsored in 1834 by the Boston-based American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), operated in the Oregon Country for several years without major incident; in 1840 Dr. Whitman reported that the Native people in the area "appeared favorably disposed, and inclined to receive religious instruction."[16] Thomas Farnham visited the site in 1839 and described a well-established and productive compound containing the mission houses and gristmill within an enclosed 250 acres of land (of which some 200 acres were under cultivation along the banks of the Walla Walla River).[17] He further noted the impressive prodigiousness of Dr. Whitman, who had come with little support and established the plantation amid the wilderness, learned the Cayuse language, and offered medical care to his and several other mission stations nearby along the busy Oregon Trail. The increased arrival of land-hungry pioneers and several disastrous epidemics eventually wrought havoc within existing Native communities on the Columbia Plateau, and according to the NPS, the Whitman Mission lay at the "center of these tragic changes."[18] In the fall of 1847, a group of discontented Cayuse men held some fifty Anglo-American men, women, and children hostage at the Whitman Mission following a deadly attack, and survivors were ransomed a month later.[19] Contemporary accounts of the "Whitman Mission massacre," usually unabashedly sympathetic to the settlers, attributed the "horrid butchery" to "remorseless savages, who appear to have been instigated to this appalling crime by a horrid suspicion which had taken possession of their superstitious minds."[20] These reports stated that a rumor had circulated

15 Mitchell et al., *Keeping National Parks*, 7.

16 American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, *Report of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, 1840* (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1840), 178.

17 Thomas Farnham, "Thomas Farnham's Description of Whitman Mission" (1839), reprinted on National Park Service, Whitman Mission National Historic Site website, http://www.nps.gov/whmi/learn/historyculture/thomas-farnhams-description-of-whitman-mission.htm.

18 NPS, Whitman Mission National Historic Site website, homepage, http://www.nps.gov/whmi/index.htm.

19 NPS, Whitman Mission National Historic Site website, "Experiences of the Captives," http://www.nps.gov/whmi/learn/historyculture/experiences-of-the-captives.htm. The NPS website states that forty-seven were held captive, while historian Cameron Addis (who provides a detailed account of the event) says fifty-three. See Cameron Addis, "The Whitman Massacre: Religion and Manifest Destiny on the Columbia Plateau, 1809–1858," *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 221–58.

20 Anonymous, "The Troubles in Oregon . . . ," *Northern Standard*, July 22, 1848, 2. See also Anonymous, "War in Oregon," *New Hampshire Sentinel*, April 1, 1848, 3, among others. A rare Native account of the event—which blames both the competitive Hudson's Bay Company and disease—can

among the Cayuse accusing Dr. Whitman of intentionally poisoning the Native population, despite his having heroically labored "incessantly since the appearance of the measles and dysentery."[21] The "massacre" quickly achieved legendary status, stunning eastern audiences and the US Congress. Taking on national significance, the events directly influenced the 1848 establishment of the Oregon Territory and the bitterly fought Cayuse War (1847–55).[22]

In 1936, Congress chartered Whitman Mission National Historic Site as "a public national memorial to Marcus Whitman and his wife, Narcissa Prentiss Whitman, who [t]here established their Indian mission and school, and ministered to the physical and spiritual needs of the Indians until massacred with twelve [*sic*] other persons in 1847."[23] With this mandate, the Park Service expanded the Whitman National Monument in 1958, and in 1963 it was redesignated as Whitman Mission National Historic Site. The change "emphasized its historic significance and the need to address the entire historic setting as well as the existing memorials" to the martyred Whitmans.[24] The National Trail System Act in 1968 linked the property to the officially commemorated Oregon Trail, thus integrating it within the larger regional and national heritage network. The park sustained its primary message through its built form and through special events. For example, it hosted annual memorial services to honor the victims until the mid-1980s, echoing the long-standing valorization of the Whitmans as heroes and martyrs. Its discontinuation of such events reflected changing attitudes on the part of Anglo-Americans, many of whom came to feel a growing "apathy, ambivalence and, some say, a willed amnesia" towards the Whitmans' increasingly discomforting legacy by that time.[25]

The 98.3 acres of WM-NHS today include the open Mission Grounds (with its reconstructed millpond, recreated Oregon Trail segment, irrigation ditches, and a small restored portion of its pasture and orchard), the Great Grave (1897), and Memorial Hill (topped by an obelisk-shaped Memorial Shaft, 1897). A visitor center and museum complete the park.[26] Rather than original structures or full reconstructions of historic buildings within the grounds, one now finds only simulated foundations of the Whitmans' first house, the subsequently built and larger Mission House complex (the Whitmans' home and meeting place for mission personnel), an

be found in Charles N. Crewdson, "How We Got Oregon: Told by Ip-ha-thal-a-Talc," *Salt Lake Herald*, November 22, 1903, 1.

21 Crewdson, "How We Got Oregon."

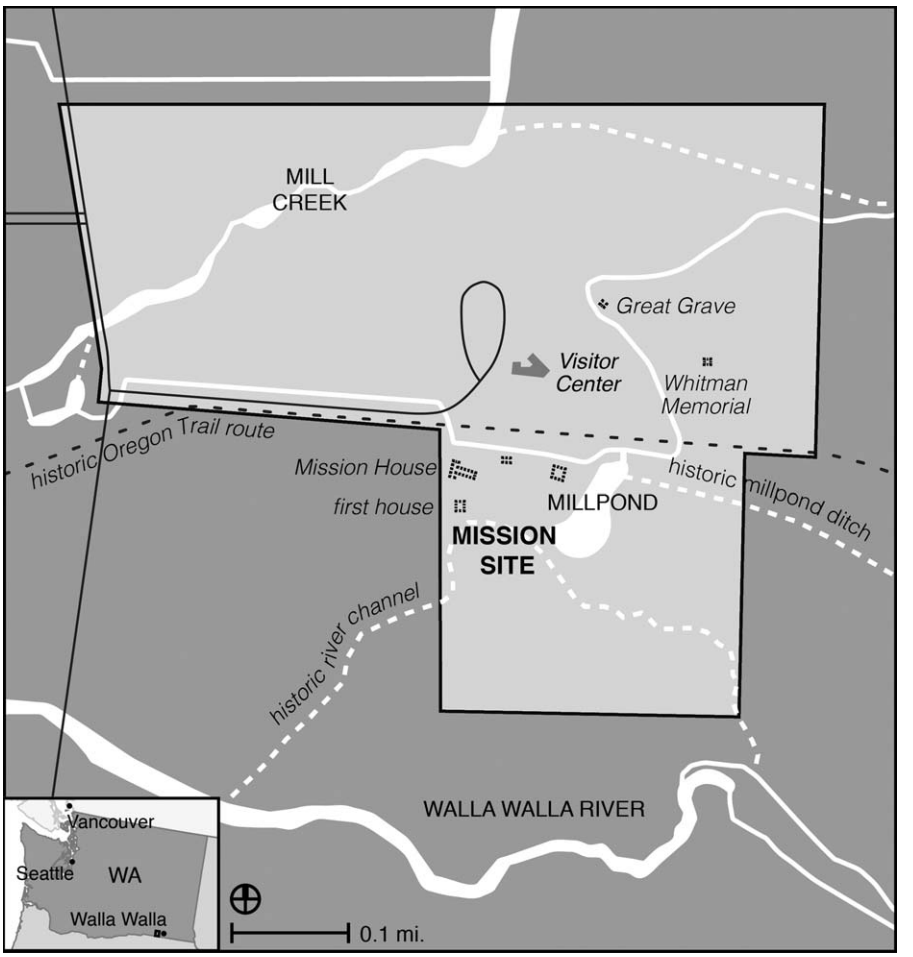
22 Addis, "Whitman Massacre."

23 US Public Law 74–840, approved June 29, 1936. Accounts vary as to the number killed, some stating a total of thirteen, others fourteen. Addis, "Whitman Massacre," 222, says fourteen.

24 National Park Service, *Whitman Mission National Historic Site General Management Plan* (2000), 2, https://www.nps.gov/whmi/learn/management/upload/whmigmp.pdf. Whitman is commemorated in several other venues, such as at Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, Whitman Middle School, in Seattle, Washington, and in Washington, DC, where he represents the state of Washington within the National Statuary Hall Collection (bronze statue dedicated 1953).

25 Keiko Morris, "Uncomfortable History: The 'Whitman Massacre,'" *Seattle Times*, November 16, 1997, http://community.seattletimes.nwsource.com/archive/?date=19971116&slug=2572792.

26 National Park Service, *Whitman Management Plan*, 46–47.



Whitman Mission National Historic Site site plan, Walla Walla, Washington. (Image generated by authors based on current NPS brochure)

emigrants' house, and a blacksmith's shop. All are delineated with low profile, foot-wide stone slabs within the clearing's trimmed turf. A series of wayside informational plaques, some with images and recorded audio, provide information on the site's history for visitors who complete self-guided tours of the property.

Visitation at WM-NHS has steadily declined in recent decades. In 1980 the park counted just over 97,500 visitors and in 1987 nearly 115,500 (this was before the regular charging of visitation fees), but in 1999 fewer than 75,000 people visited the site.[27] In 2015 the NPS counted just 39,525 visitors, despite having welcomed approximately 58,500 the year before (roughly typical for the 2010s).[28] In 1993, the WM-NHS noted that the relatively isolated unit's "visitors are predominately white, [and are] family groups comprising two to four people."[29] At the time, the

27 National Park Service, *Whitman Management Plan*, 65.
28 National Park Service: NPS Stats, "Whitman Mission NHS," https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/.
29 National Park Service, *Whitman Management Plan*, 67.

Whitman Mission National Historic Site, Walla Walla, Washington. View from southwest towards the Memorial Hill in the distance. The reconstructed foundations of the Mission House are visible in the foreground. (Photo by Daniel E. Coslett, 2016)

typical visitor lived within a fifty-mile radius and often accompanied a visiting relative to the park, the exception being organized school groups (accounting for roughly 10 percent of annual visitors), of which minority children, primarily Hispanic, typically constituted a quarter of the group.[30]

The most recent *Whitman Mission National Historic Site General Management Plan* (2000) identifies five reasons for the park's historic significance. These include: the mission's foundation and the "massacre"; the representation of historic power dynamics and cultural misunderstandings through a "clash of cultures";[31] the mission site as a stop on the Oregon Trail that was founded in part by women; the protracted fighting between Native forces, militia, and federal troops resulting in the establishment of the Oregon Territory (in 1848) and the Treaty of 1855;[32] and the preservation of specific built elements such as the Great Grave, Mission Grounds, and Memorial Hill.[33] The plan also presents three chief interpretative goals for the park. Included are the introduction of the public to "the Mission

30 Ibid.

31 The language used in the document describes the conflict as a "clash between two cultures and their lack of understanding and ability to solve problems peacefully." National Park Service, *Whitman Management Plan*, 1. Given the power differential between communities, some might question the viability of a peaceful solution, and thus the later criticism of its absence.

32 Through the treaty the area's tribes surrendered more than 6.4 million acres of land to the US government. For the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's current perspective on the Treaty of 1855, see Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, "Treaty of 1855," http://ctuir.org/treaty-1855.

33 National Park Service, *Whitman Management Plan*, 1.

Period" and the "clash of cultures" between pioneers and the region's indigenous peoples; the site's importance as a stop along the Oregon Trail and influence of women in the group upon other women considering westward travel; as well as the significance of the massacre with regard to the creation of the Oregon Territory.[34] The plan characterizes Marcus and Narcissa Whitman as heroic figures who "exemplify the courageous and dedicated character of pioneers that settled the West in the 19th century," many of whom made the journey "to serve God by serving Indians."[35] The document goes on to describe their "unfortunate, if not inevitable" conflict with the Cayuse before concluding that "regardless of the changing judgments and interpretation of westward expansion, the Whitman story continues to be one of courage, commitment, and sacrifice for an ideal."[36] Lingering language such as this may continue to cloud views of the site's complex and confrontational history, while the consistent use of arguably biased terms such as "massacre" in NPS literature remains somewhat problematic.

Generally speaking, the park, both online and on site, has tried to update and modernize its presentation of the past, but occasionally still suffers from inconsistent and sometimes even contradictory interpretation. The WM-NHS website directly addresses the complexity of the events by using the bold heading "Retribution or Revenge?" in reference to circumstances surrounding the missionaries' notorious deaths.[37] The introductory text then asserts that "the circumstances that surround this tragic event resonate with modern issues of cultural interaction and differing perspectives."[38] Additional digital features about the site include reproductions of letters written by Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, links to a series of YouTube videos on the mission, and a version of Clifford Drury's 1973 biography of the family—all clarifying the site's significance. Of the ABCFM, the website adds that the still-active group has "historically been involved in leading the nation in recognition of Native American sovereignty, the repeal of slavery, and restoration of indigenous rights in South Africa, [while] today . . . fighting for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender rights."[39] The website also points out that in the Cayuse attack, the federal government found "an excuse to set up reservations and restrict the movement of Native Americans."[40] Such claims both redeem and criticize, but also explicitly tether the site's past to the lived present. In the second case the NPS not only attempts to acknowledge the problematic nature of the site's history and

34 National Park Service, *Whitman Management Plan*, 1–2.

35 National Park Service, *Whitman Management Plan*, 43.

36 Ibid.

37 NPS, Whitman Mission National Historic Site website, homepage.

38 Ibid.

39 NPS, Whitman Mission National Historic Site website, "Learn About the Park," http://www.nps.gov/whmi/learn/index.htm. The page offers no further explanation for its point about Native rights, despite its apparent incongruity with the historic oppositional evangelical/settler-Native relationship generally advanced by the massacre story. Incidentally, the same text describes the Whitmans' goals at the mission as "honorable intentions."

40 NPS, Whitman Mission National Historic Site website, "Learn About the Park."

interpretation, but specifically highlights the larger ramifications of events here to the lives of millions of Native Americans. Importantly, the website asserts that Native voices are now actively included in the site's interpretation "through partnering with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation" in the presentation of "the continuing story of the Cayuse Nation and the impact of this early interaction with foreign immigrants."[41]

The on-site experience at WM-NHS largely mirrors the complexity of its online presence. Site managers have clearly attempted to address the conflict with an even-handed approach that actively incorporates Native voices and their critiques of settlers' actions and openly presents the site's history of commemoration and interpretation. The large visitor center includes a permanent exhibition divided into sections labeled: "The Cayuse," "Whitman's World," "The Mission," and "Cayuse Tradition," all of which are arranged around a life-sized tableau featuring an encounter between the Whitmans and Cayuse amid period farming equipment. This presentation is the product of an effort to more directly represent indigenous ways of life and perspectives undertaken when the museum was last renovated in 1987.[42] Providing an even more balanced interpretation, an orientation film produced in 2012 presents the larger historical context and particulars regarding the Whitmans' arrival and establishment of the mission through live-action reenactments.[43] In it, Native actors depict Native Americans in re-created scenes, and both white and Native scholars contribute documentary-style commentary. The film goes to great lengths in presenting different opinions without struggling to fully resolve them. Indeed, it verges on vilifying western expansion by emphasizing its exploitative and destructive nature, while also pointing out that some Cayuse were tolerant of the Whitmans' presence and, according to an interviewed scholar, willfully converted to Christianity. The film does little to explicitly redeem the missionaries, ultimately presenting the events as a tragedy that would lead to greater disenfranchisement and suppression of Native Americans in the West. Seasonal cultural demonstrations, such as tulé decoy making and tipi construction, further introduce visitors to Native ways of living on site.[44]

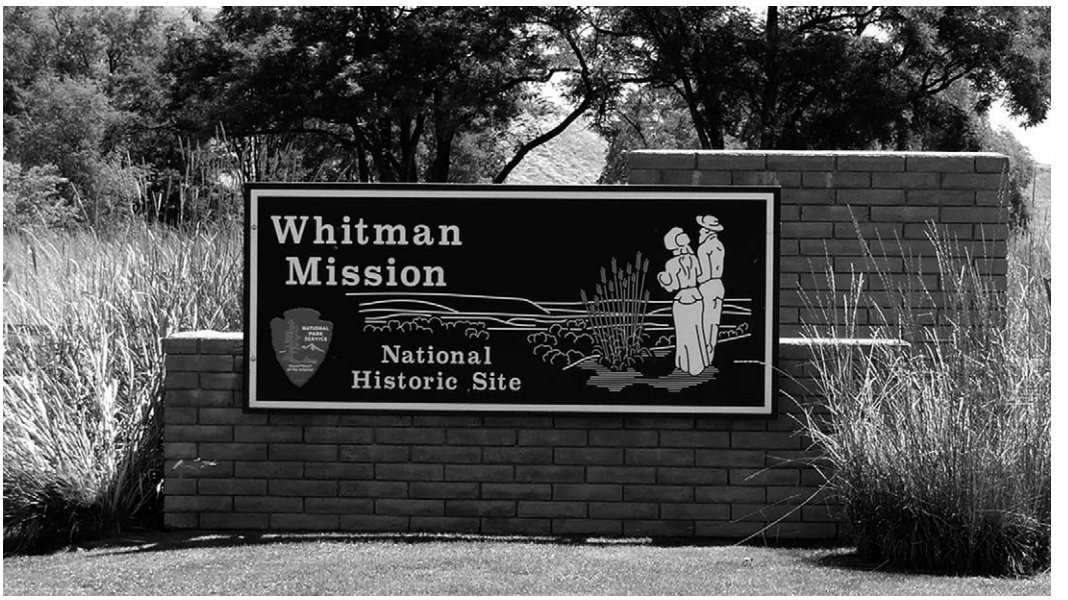
Elsewhere in the visitor center, further critique comes in the form of temporary printed placards that reinforce critical perspectives introduced online and in the orientation film. Headings such as "Imperialistic Mindset and the Attack on the

41 Ibid.

42 Morris, "Uncomfortable History."

43 *A Prophecy Fulfilled: The Cayuse and the Whitmans at Waiilatpu* (North Shore Productions, 2012). The film has been made freely available online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFLsOEnKMgo.

44 The park's staff publicizes these events frequently using its official Instagram account (whitmanmissionnps). Children are otherwise invited year-round to explore the park with the help of specially designed "Junior Explorer" information and activity packets, which are part of the larger NPS "Junior Ranger" program. Though predictably simplistic in content (the target age groups are 4–6 and 7–8 years), it does encourage young visitors to consider the park's nature, the experience of pioneer families, and basic differences between Anglo-American and Cayuse cultures.



Whitman Mission National Historic Site entrance sign from the 1970s until 2014, Walla Walla, Washington. An image of this sign is now included on an exhibit inside the visitor center titled "A Changing Park." Its imagery reflected the site's longstanding focus on the Whitmans and pioneer experience. (Photo by James Burke, 2008)

Mission" are noteworthy. Other signs directly address the history of the site itself, acknowledging its very one-sided origin; a historiographic panel titled "A Changing Park" introduces these ideas by revealing that "until recently Whitman Mission National Historic Site has only been presented from an Anglo American point of view." As evidence, the same panel includes a photograph of the site's entry sign that until 2014—when the current reinterpretation process made its public debut—included an image of the Whitman couple amid an expansive, unoccupied landscape. Beneath a photo of the current sign, which includes only the Department of the Interior insignia, the display informs visitors that rather than focusing on pioneer life exclusively, "the future of Whitman Mission lies in presenting a multi-cultural view of the events that happened at the site," and that "the Cayuse view of history is essential." This particularly self-aware placard also states that until 2010 the site's audio tour concluded by stating that "Marcus and Narcissa Whitman were killed by some of the Indians they came to save."[45] At the same time, although some of the narrative recordings that accompany exhibits at the site have since been edited, much of the deployed imagery remains both sensational and biased. Although some signage does consider the roles of Native Americans and of white women and children at the mission station, one panel installed next to the Mission House foundation includes graphic depictions of the assault on the Whitmans and identifies

45 On-site observation by author, Whitman Mission National Historic Site Visitor Center, March 2016.

Wayside exhibit at the Whitman Mission National Historic Site, Walla Walla, Washington. Situated adjacent to the reconstructed foundations of the Mission House, this sign illustrates the violent attack on the Whitmans and includes the floorplan of the building, indicating the exact locations of their deaths. (Photo by Daniel E. Coslett, 2016)

the exact location of their deaths on a reproduced building plan. The accompanying audio, in potentially jarring juxtaposition, states that "the Cayuse were on the verge of losing not just individual people, but their entire cultural identity," before recounting the attack without gory specifics. It concludes by acknowledging that:

> There is a tendency to want to take sides, but the event was extremely complex . . . [and] tragic for all involved. Unfortunately friction caused by the differing religious and political views still occurs, sometimes erupting in violence.[46]

Consistency in presentation content and tenor across interpretive media thus remains an issue warranting attention by park administrators.

Ultimately, the NPS has staged the entire site as a historical snapshot (of 1847), with little clear acknowledgment of postmassacre developments or of preservation efforts undertaken to achieve the static image. Indeed, there remain opportunities to better interpret existing commemorative assets, such as at the Whitman Memorial atop the hill and the Great Grave. Although the former is inscribed only with "Whitman" and offers no on-site explanation of its history, the latter incorporates a copy of the tomb's original weathered text without interrogating the biased nature of its antiquated language. The WM-NHS staff is sensitive to these significant

46 On-site observation by author, Whitman Mission National Historic Site "November 29, 1847" wayside exhibit, March 2016.

The Great Grave at the Whitman Mission National Historic Site, Walla Walla, Washington. The sign lists the members of the slain Whitman party using the original language from the worn inscription on the coverstone (at right) with minimal contextualizing commentary. (Photo by Daniel E. Coslett, 2016)

shortcomings, and conversations with a park ranger have confirmed that work is underway to completely update and redesign the site's brochures, wayside signage, and museum displays. The park has submitted funding requests for generating new materials that would expand upon the critical interpretative approach now found in the orientation film and temporary museum placards.[47] Positive changes are therefore coming, pending the lengthy bureaucratic approval process.

While the site's expanded interpretation has resonance with its predominantly Anglo-American audiences who are increasingly ill at ease with the commemoration of violence, for many Native Americans the Whitman Mission event (and, indeed, the larger history of western settlement) remains a painful episode requiring continued healing.[48] Members of the confederated Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla tribes today recognize the significance of the Whitman party and the death of so many of its members. The reasons for the attack, which the tribes' website characterize as "many and varied," include:

> non-payment for property taken by the mission; increasing immigrations; Whitman's encroachment on Indian trade; fear of Whitman himself, whom the Indians believed had poisoned them; and the constant outbreaks of

47 Kate Kunkel-Patterson (NPS), telephone interview with author, April 22, 2016. Although brochures will be redesigned in the coming few years, more substantial wayside exhibit improvements may take up to a decade to be completed, she cautioned.

48 Morris, "Uncomfortable History."

> diseases introduced by Whitman and other non-Indians which had reduced the Tribe's population by half.[49]

The official website furthermore notes that in several cases the traditional punishment for a failed doctor or "medicine man" was execution, particularly in cases where the physician had been deemed responsible for a patient's death.[50] Several of these explanations are only recently being afforded attention outside Native circles. Their conveyance at WM-NHS is still not entirely clear.

San Juan Island National Historical Park

On the edge of the Pacific Northwest, a territorial confrontation between the British Empire and United States resulted in a twelve-year (1860–72) joint occupation of San Juan Island. The Hudson's Bay Company had been active in the area and represented British interests on the island, which otherwise hosted small fishing and farming communities. During this period of intense westward expansion, however, the island had been deemed strategically important because, according to a vocal member of the British Columbia legislature, "whoever holds San Juan . . . can close the waters of British Columbia," and like a North American Gibraltar, the island could help or hinder the "guard[ing] of our whole country."[51] In 1859 an American citizen found a British-owned pig to have been "several times a great annoyance" and to have destroyed part of his garden. His subsequent shooting of the animal triggered the hasty deployment of military forces and a standoff between nations ultimately competing for possession of the liminal islands and their waterways.[52] The 1871 Washington Treaty halted the purported "Pig War," and arbitration by German Kaiser Wilhelm I (declared a neutral party) the following year firmly established the border between British Canada and the United States with the granting of the island group to the latter. Opinions differed regarding the place's actual significance; despite its considerable controversy and sensationalized celebrity, the island was deemed by at least one American reporter at the time to be merely a "little speck . . . not of much consequence."[53]

Congress established San Juan Island National Historical Park in 1966, charging it with

> interpreting and preserving the sites of the American and English camps on the island, and . . . commemorating the historic events that occurred there from

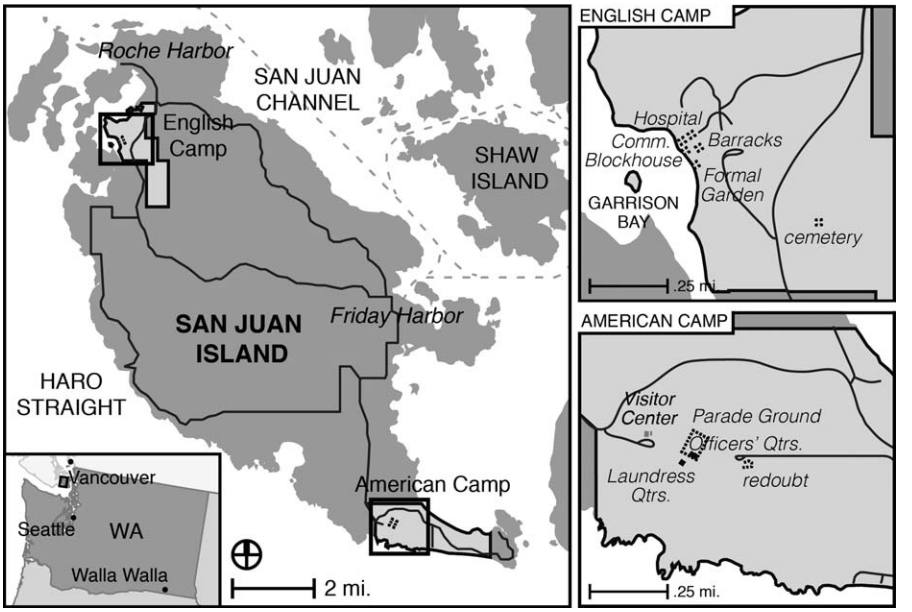
49 Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation website, "History of CTUIR," http://ctuir.org/history-culture/history-ctuir. This account of the events explicitly from the Cayuse perspective is not specifically referenced or linked to the NPS site.

50 Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Reservation, "History of CTUIR."

51 John S. Helmcken, "The Key to the Western Door of the Dominion: Speech of Hon. Dr. Helmcken before the Legislative Council of British Columbia," February 15, 1871, in *British Colonist*, February 17, 1871, 3.

52 Lyman A. Cutlar, "Affidavit of Lyman A. Cutlar Regarding Pig Shooting," September 7, 1859, National Archives, AOTUC blog, http://blogs.archives.gov/aotus/?p=4842.

53 Anonymous, "The San Juan Boundary," *New York Herald*, September 22, 1872, 8.



San Juan Island and the San Juan Island National Historical Park site plans, Friday Harbor, Washington. (Image generated by authors based on current NPS brochure)

> 1853 to 1871 in connection with the final settlement of the Oregon Territory boundary dispute, *including* [emphasis added] the so-called Pig War of 1859.[54]

Currently totaling 1,752 acres, the park's American (1,223 acres) and English (529 acres) camps sit on the second-largest island of the San Juan archipelago in northwestern Washington between Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada, and the US mainland. Although archaeological investigations have revealed that San Juan Island has been home to Native Americans for over nine thousand years,[55] its joint occupation by armed forces of the United States and Great Britain during the 1860s remains the park's primary claim to fame. With the evacuation of the British Royal Marines following the resolution of the border dispute in 1872, the English Camp became the homestead of the Crook family and remained mostly farmland until the State of Washington acquired it in 1963. Enabling legislation allocated funds in 1966 for land acquisition, which continued into the 1970s and required the displacement of considerable private interests and removal of most evidence of the area's post–Pig War developments.[56] The resulting "frozen landscapes" of the park

54 US Public Law 89–565, approved September 9, 1966.

55 Mike Vouri, "Native American Stewardship Series," NPS, San Juan Island National Historical Park website, https://www.nps.gov/sajh/learn/historyculture/copy-of-native-american-stewardship-series.htm.

56 On land acquisition, see David Smolker, "Frozen Landscapes, Swirling History: Constructing Meaning at San Juan Island National Historical Park" (master's thesis, University of Washington, 2012), 20–22. For more on preservation plans and works done to create a coherent 1860s ambiance during the 1970s, see National Park Service, *General Management Plan* (1978), 26–39.

San Juan Island National Historical Park English Camp, San Juan Island, Washington. View from south. Behind the reconstructed formal garden are the blockhouse, flagpole, and commissary. (Photo by Daniel E. Coslett, 2016)

unit reflect the era of the occupation as much as is possible, with minimal reconstructions or anachronistic impositions from subsequent events.[57]

The park's two camps lie at opposite ends of the island, and each reflects its history with similarly sparse built environments. Although the British left twenty-seven buildings to the American military upon evacuating their position, merely four whitewashed structures remain from the occupation period, including a blockhouse, storehouse, hospital, and barracks. A reconstructed white picket fence now encloses the site's re-created formal garden, and not far from it stands an eighty-foot flagpole donated by the United Kingdom in 1998. Otherwise the site consists of a tree- and hill-framed open space overlooking the serene Garrison Bay. The nearby Crook family home and two orchards survive on the campsite from the post-occupation period.[58] Structures at the English Camp are identified using brief explanatory signage, which for the most part fails to inform about the history of sale, relocation, and maintenance of these period buildings in any detail. Dramatically overlooking Griffin Bay and Haro Straight, the larger American Camp consists of three original whitewashed structures (laundresses' quarters and two officers' quarters) and a re-creation of the fenced parade ground and another flagpole. As at the English Camp, a few information panels include explanatory text and images of the occupation-era

57 Smolker, "Frozen Landscapes," 20–22.

58 The house, built in 1903, has been painted grey to distinguish it from earlier camp-era buildings painted white.

San Juan Island National Historical Park American Camp, San Juan Island, Washington. View from southeast. The larger buildings inside the parade ground's reconstructed fence are original officers' quarters buildings. The laundresses' quarters are outside the enclosed parade ground at left. (Photo by Daniel E. Coslett, 2016)

state of the camp, reinforcing the relative openness of the cultural landscape. Adjacent sites associated with the Hudson's Bay Company, a sheep farm, and San Juan Town[59] are identified and thus augment the historic character of the island's windswept southeastern tip. As information panels at the visitor center (year-round located at the American Camp, but seasonally open within the barracks at the English Camp as well) point out, both campsites include a diverse array of pastoral landscapes, vegetation, and wildlife, and they each front picturesque and prized marine environments. The addition of picnicking facilities and hiking trails make this expansive site "just as much [a] neighborhood park as it is national park, just as much [a] backyard as it is hallowed ground."[60]

Its ecological appeal notwithstanding, SJI-NHP has seen visitation levels stagnate. A steady increase in attendance during the park's first decades was followed by considerable growth in the 1980s. That period culminated in a maximum in 1991, when just over 359,000 individual visits occurred. The park has only hosted more than 300,000 people once since then, in 2001, and subsequent annual totals have averaged nearly 259,000. Indeed, the 2015 visitation count peaked at just under that

59 San Juan Town was completely destroyed by a fire in 1890, but during the occupation era the settlement consisted primarily of hotels, brothels, and saloons. Cellar depressions were are all that remained on site by the late 1970s.

60 Smolker, "Frozen Landscapes," 6.

number, reflecting this longstanding consistency.[61] The isolation of San Juan Island—accessible only by ferry—and the relative obscurity of the Pig War episode likely explain the park's modest visitation figures.

The NPS acknowledges that SJI-NHP "is the only site that illustrates, in its dramatic and largely intact physical setting, how war can be averted and peace maintained through positive action by individuals and governments—a powerful message in unsettled times,"[62] but the sensational story of the celebrated Pig War continues to dominate digital, print, and on-site interpretive materials.[63] Indeed, SJI-NHP has focused efforts towards reestablishing the occupation-era state of the property, through its (primarily re-created) historic built environments and, more recently, its uncluttered, "frozen" cultural landscapes.[64] Its 2008 *General Management Plan* reflects this primary interpretation of the park's foundational mandate, acknowledging the centrality of the dramatic conflict and identifying four "fundamental resources and values" and associated interpretive themes.[65] Included focal points are the Pig War and its peaceful resolution; the significance of the camps as rich cultural landscapes; the presence of the Hudson's Bay Company and its participation in British colonialism; and the preservation of significant natural habitats and resources.[66] Additionally, recreational, educational, research, and volunteer opportunities, the presentation of both the pioneer lifestyle and post-military periods, as well as archaeological representation of thousands of years of Native residency, are listed as secondary park attributes.[67] This range of objectives thus reflect the park's mandate, which includes the Pig War episode but does not restrict its mission to that event alone.

The current NPS-hosted website for the SJI-NHP introduces the park through the familiar Pig War story, its leading headline boasting "Peace over War."[68] While a considerable portion of online content relates to the park's natural offerings (hiking trails, flora, whale watching, etc.), the website still relies heavily on the military theme, pointing out prominently that "here in 1859 the United States and Great Britain nearly went to war over possession of the island."[69] It further

61 The 2015 total was actually 15 over the average for 2002–2015 (inclusive). Statistics for SJI-NHP visitation published on NPS, NPS Stats, "San Juan Island NHP," https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/ were found to be incorrect and will be amended by the NPS. The correct figures used here are from Pamela Ziesler (NPS), e-mail correspondence with author, September 12, 2016.

62 National Park Service, *San Juan Island National Historical Park Final General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement* (2008), 1, https://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=340&projectID=11187&documentID=24962.

63 Special events during the summer, including military reenactments during the weekend–long "Encampment" event (established in 1998), further introduce visitors to the park's Pig War history.

64 Smolker, "Frozen Landscapes."

65 General management plans are comprehensive documents prepared by the NPS intended to outline the significance of each unit and include ecological analyses as well as proposed operational changes and management guidelines for periods of fifteen to twenty years.

66 National Park Service, *San Juan Island Management Plan*, 15–16.

67 National Park Service, *San Juan Island Management Plan*, 16–18.

68 National Park Service, San Juan Island National Historical Park website, https://www.nps.gov/sajh/index.htm.

69 Ibid.

maintains that the dominant narrative of peaceful negotiation and compromise demonstrate the site's significance today. That said, attention has also been paid to Native histories and uses of the park property through a page titled "The First Ones" nested within a category labeled "People."[70] Digital photos and multimedia exhibitions, educational information, and nature guides further expand the park's online presence and reinforce the idea that the SJI-NHP is an active and relevant public asset with historical and environmental significance.

Despite obvious efforts to raise awareness and expand interpretation of this site's conflicted past, the visitors' experience on site at SJI-NHP remains somewhat limited, particularly when compared to the significantly self-aware WM-NHS. Even as the park works to share a more nuanced version of its past within the parameters of its foundational mandate, the military era dominates visitors' on-site experience. Inside the relatively small SJI-NHP visitor center, for example, one is immediately confronted by a large mannequin wearing a historic US Army uniform, as well as display cases containing artifacts recovered from the period of the 1860s.[71] Mural exhibits, although they do address the park's interest in Native American and ecological history, provide even more information on the Pig War, thereby reemphasizing the venerated episode. A short orientation film summarizes the saga for visitors and focuses on living conditions at the two camps, encouraging visitors to reflect on the historic events and appreciate that "war can sometimes be avoided through peaceful arbitration."[72] Although the park's open landscapes and wildlife are certainly impressive, the attention afforded to them through digital platforms does not seem as prominent when actually exploring the property. The rolling prairie of the American Camp is particularly striking, but signage and brochures only superficially engage the NPS's substantial work with ongoing architectural and landscape restoration and maintenance.[73] For example, one of the officers' buildings at the American Camp, dating to 1856, was relocated from downtown Friday Harbor to its original location in 2010. It still awaits renovation following the years of archaeological investigations undertaken in the area (completed in 2012), as an apparently provisional sign on display in the dilapidated structure's window recounts.

SJI-NHP operates with a limited, but flexible mandate that allows for the exploration of several different themes beyond the actual Pig War conflict. Clearly it is a less controversial site than Whitman Mission, but many of its potentially informative aspects remain underdeveloped in its interpretive programs. For example, women's experience at the camps is engaged almost exclusively through the

70 NPS, San Juan Island National Historical Park website, "The First Ones," http://www.nps.gov/sajh/learn/historyculture/the-first-ones.htm.

71 Artifacts representing the park's Native American past are not currently displayed here. The particular ranger working during a March 2016 research visit was unsure of their present location.

72 *Where History Comes to Life*, directed by Anne Tubiolo (Henninger Media Services, 2007).

73 The prairie is now rare in the Pacific Northwest region. Its restoration projects are focused on reversing the effects of invasive species and Anglo settlers.

Laundresses' quarters at the San Juan Island National Historical Park American Camp. San Juan Island, Washington (Photo by Daniel E. Coslett, 2016)

presentation of the laundresses' quarters (closed to the public) even as they are depicted on signs elsewhere in other roles, such as wives and guests. Though park literature acknowledges the presence of Native Americans and of Spanish explorers, on-site interpretation does not directly interrogate issues of colonization and displacement and only renders apparent minimal traces of pre-settler cultures.[74] Were these historical layers and perspectives better developed and their relationships to one another and to the park as a whole made more explicit, the contemporary relevance and appeal of SJI-NHP would be substantially enhanced. Its history would be more critically told, while its experience might facilitate the engagement of issues including not just war and peace, but also other issues of wider contemporary relevance, such as critical historiography, cultural identity, climate change, and immigration.

74 President Obama designated seventy-five sites, totaling one thousand acres, within the island archipelago as the San Juan Islands National Monument in 2013. Protected sites, most of which are uninhabited islands or rock outcroppings, include Coastal Salish archaeological remains, settler landmarks (such as lighthouses), and nature zones. The monument is administered by the Bureau of Land Management and is distinct from the NPS-run SJI-NHP. See Bureau of Land Management, "San Juan Islands National Monument," http://www.blm.gov/or/resources/recreation/sanjuans/. Members of the Coastal Salish Tribes, which do not seem to have been very vocal publically about SJI-NHP in recent years, have welcomed this new protection of other hereditary lands in the region. "We Have a Monument! Islanders and Coastal Salish Tribes Celebrate President Obama Establishing San Juan Islands National Monument by Proclamation," *Indian Country Today Media Network,* March 26, 2013, http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/03/26/we-have-monument-islanders-and-coast-salish-tribes-celebrate-president-obama-establishing.

As demonstrated by these two case studies, the NPS's efforts to expand interpretation programs have been ongoing in recent years. In preparation for its 2016 centennial, the agency has made great efforts to highlight the system's invaluable assets and broaden public participation opportunities to better connect with its constituents. It conducted more than forty "listening sessions" and collected six thousand public comments from them, which it used to generate five specific NPS centennial goals.[75] Themes emerging from this solicited feedback included stewardship ("caring for America's treasures"), environmental leadership ("setting the green standard"), recreational experience ("enjoying nature and culture"), education ("learning in America's greatest classrooms"), and professional excellence ("preserving the passion").[76] These objectives are consistent with general agency policies and reflect a necessary commitment to public engagement in comprehensive planning. While the NPS identifies issues of relevance, reinterpretation, and diversity as components of the education theme, it remains noteworthy that it has addressed none of these directly or in its own right. Within the realm of educational policy the NPS intends to "introduce young people and their families to their national parks by using exciting media and technology" to "promote life-long learning" and to ultimately "impart to every American a sense of their [*sic*] ownership of their [*sic*] national parks."[77]

Not only did the NPS publish centennial-inspired goals for the agency in general, but each park unit has also prepared individualized "Centennial Strategy" reports. The superintendent of WM-NHS in 2007 proposed "utilizing sustainable and environmentally sensitive practices in such a way that the resources will be accessible, available, and relevant to a diverse public both today and for future generations." The management also proposed employing "innovative partnerships, incorporating appropriate technologies (old and new), and evaluat[ing] . . . past practices, making adjustment/corrections as necessary to protect resources."[78] Additional goals focused heavily on environmental and education issues and specifically included the restoration of Doan Creek's natural habitat and the reinvigoration of ranger-led programs intended to better present the site as a cultural and natural resource.[79] The SJI-NHP "Centennial Strategy" vision statement similarly addressed that park's expanded goals, noting both the commemoration of the Pig War and the promotion of "compatible recreation and education opportunities that are accessible to a diverse public and which encourage sustainability

75 *The Future of America's National Parks: A Report to the President of the United States from the Secretary of the Interior Dick Kempthorne* (NPS, May 2007), http://www.nps.gov/deto/learn/management/upload/2016presidentsreport.pdf.

76 Ibid.

77 *Future of America's National Parks*, 13.

78 National Park Service, "First Annual Centennial Strategy: Whitman Mission Historic Site" (August 2007), 1, https://www.nps.gov/whmi/learn/management/centennial-initiative-2016.htm.

79 "First Annual Centennial Strategy: Whitman Mission Historic Site," 4–9.

of resources."[80] It included the maintenance of historic structures, management of invasive species, and restoration of the prairie landscape according to *National Resource Challenge* protocols, among the predominantly environment-focused plans.[81] In both cases such laudable aims diversify unit presentations, in addition to being positive steps in landscape stewardship. Arguably, however, they fall short of directly engaging the park's more complex and controversial human histories, particularly with regard to the perennially marginalized contributions and experiences of Native peoples.

Further involving public participation, the NPS has launched a series of efforts to engage visitors in not only taking ownership of sites, but in identifying and celebrating aspects thereof that individuals find to be important. Examples include academic design projects and social media campaigns. In 2011 the NPS, in cooperation with the Van Alen Institute, launched the "Parks for the People" initiative in an attempt to increase awareness concerning park units and the pressing need for change.[82] Design student participants were welcomed to "generate new and innovative ideas for the design and planning for a twenty-first century conception of national parks, the experiences of their visitors, the sustainability of their infrastructure, and their relationship to the public."[83] Teams selected parks and prepared projects towards achieving these ends, tailored specifically to further NPS centennial themes.[84] More recently, the NPS's "Find Your Park" campaign has invited citizens to celebrate and explore their parks by tagging personal Twitter and Instagram posts with the #findyourpark label in order to aggregate and share them online.[85] These are but two recent examples of successful programs designed to engage design professionals and students, as well as more general social media–savvy audiences. They have successfully generated interest (at various levels of engagement) among younger segments of the population that have been less invested in the national parks than previous generations.

80 National Park Service, "Centennial Strategy: San Juan Island National Historical Park" (August 2007), 1, https://www.nps.gov/sajh/learn/management/centennial-initiative-2016.htm.

81 National Park Service, "Centennial Strategy: San Juan Island National Historical Park," 4.

82 Van Alen Institute, Parks for the People, http://parksforthepeople.vanalen.org/.

83 Van Alen Institute, Parks for the People, "About," http://parksforthepeople.vanalen.org/about.html.

84 SJI-NHP was chosen by a team of students from the University of Washington in Seattle, and a team co-headed by Manish Chalana (with Ken Yocom) was one of eight competition finalists. The proposal aimed to reinvigorate the park through wetland and orchard restoration, reestablishing the old military road that linked the opposing camps, and adding a community center to existing visitor center facilities. Jurors praised the entry for its presentation of the park as a key open space in a growing metropolitan area, and for asserting that the "small park is big in other ways—and critical to bringing the city dweller in contact with the National Park Service mission in their own backyard." See Van Alen Institute, Parks for the People, "Competition Winners, University of Washington," http://parksforthepeople.vanalen.org/cw_uw.html.

85 National Park Service, "Find Your Park," https://www.nps.gov/subjects/centennial/findyourpark.htm. The special Instagram tag was #findyourpark. As of September 11, 2016, there were over 545,200 tagged photographs from park visitors and enthusiasts.

The relatively small and remote parks in Washington State discussed in this work have successfully rearticulated their interpretative narratives to varying degrees, particularly using online media, while remaining true to their founding mandates. Indeed, both WM-NHS and SJI-NHP have demonstrated progress. The former—clearly a more contested site at its core—is commendably adopting more robust interpretations of multiple histories without shying away from the shame and pain that stems from dealing with its difficult past. Indeed there are many NPS units, particularly in the western United States, that commemorate events involving conflict with Native Americans that are increasingly reconciling complex histories with contemporary historiographic methods. Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site and the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument are but two examples. In 2000 the former was charged with not only preserving the historic site of the 1864 massacre of two hundred members of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, but also with assisting in minimizing the likelihood of such abhorrent acts' recurrence.[86] The "intimidating," if not "impossible," mandate has proven to be provocative and broadly relevant, according to the unit's superintendent.[87] It also demonstrates that new legislative mandates can be crafted to be more ambitious and inclusively relevant. Little Bighorn, on the other hand, operating within its legacy mandate, is now presented as "a place of reflection" rather than just the location of Custer's "last stand."[88] It incorporates several specific commemorative installations intended to represent previously marginalized perspectives, as well as actual Native voices through Native-led park tours intended to complement existing ranger-led excursions.[89]

The recent establishment of what some colloquially label "dark parks" within the NPS, which commemorate and present particularly "sinister chapters of our past . . . offer[ing] lessons in survival" and hope, are steps in the right direction and reflect a merging of interests between the NPS and public.[90] Examples found across

86 Thomas Curwen, "Confronting Our History and 'Unspeakable Acts' at the Site of the Sand Creek Massacre," *Los Angeles Times*, July 31 2016. The park's mandate also requires that the unit address the "national significance of the massacre in American history, and its ongoing significance to the Cheyenne and Arapaho people and the descendants of the massacre victims." See 2000's US Public Law 106–465.

87 Curwen, "Confronting."

88 National Park Service, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument website, homepage, http://www.nps.gov/libi/index.htm.

89 A "Peace through unity" theme was adopted by a panel of Native leaders who participated in the design of a memorial intended to represent the Native perspectives, and the 2003 installation next to the obelisk is a striking theoretical and visual counterpoint to the predominant "Last Stand" account. See NPS, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument website, "Indian Memorial at Little Bighorn," http://www.nps.gov/libi/indian-memorial-at-little-bighorn.htm. The Crow Tribe's Apsaalooke Tours present a personalized, local perspective on the battle and its context.

90 Jonathan Thompson et al., "Dark Parks," *High Country News*, March 7, 2016, 8. For more on myth and interpretation at national heritage sites, see Paul Shackel, ed., *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, 2001).

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Crow Agency, Montana. Red granite markers have been placed throughout the battlefield since 1999, identifying the locations of Native American deaths and complementing the white markers for US military personnel scattered throughout the site in 1890. In the distance is the Seventh US Cavalry Memorial (1881). (Photo by Daniel E. Coslett, 2016)

the country include the Andersonville National Historic Site, a Civil War prisoner camp for Union soldiers; Kalaupapa National Historic Park, a quarantine zone for Hawaiians infected with leprosy during the colonization process; Minuteman Missile National Historic Site, an area dotted with Cold War–era nuclear missile silos; and Manzanar National Historic Site, a relocation campsite of Japanese American internment during World War II. These NPS units offer contemplative places for consideration of the less savory aspects of our nation's struggles with violence and oppression. Such episodes and challenges need not only be explored in "dark parks," however, because all historic sites should—as far as is possible—introduce visitors "to the contested, evolving patterns by which Americans remember, remake, and use our civic traditions to meet new challenges."[91] The Stonewall National Monument, designated by President Obama in June 2016, is a positive step forward. It demonstrates the administration's desire "to protect places that are diverse, culturally and historically significant, and that reflect the story of all Americans" and progress towards the necessary diversification of the NPS portfolio.[92] Parks like these

91 Anne Mitchell Whisnant, Marla Miller, Gary Nash, and David Thelen, *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service* (Bloomington, IN: Organization of American Historians, 2011), 110.

92 The White House Office of the Press Secretary, "President Obama Designates Stonewall National Monument," press release, June 24, 2016, White House website, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/24/president-obama-designates-stonewall-national-monument. On the government's limited work towards diversifying the United States' cultural history record, particularly

may inspire tolerance by revealing and exploring prejudice while contributing to important communal healing processes. The words of Marie Sanchez of the Northern Cheyenne regarding the infamous Sand Creek massacre resonate at WM-NHS and other NPS units with difficult pasts. More fairly balanced and complete presentation of site histories would be meaningful, she notes, saying that she knows "it won't alleviate alcoholism and drug abuse and crimes of passion or suicides, but it would help our children understand what happened to us as a people."[93] Although the NPS has been working towards expanding multiple histories at its properties, the degree to which these adjustments successfully ameliorate lingering pain and feelings of exclusion will only become clear in time.

A 2011 assessment by the Organization of American Historians, titled *Imperiled Promise: The State of History in the National Park Service*, highlighted a number of innovative programs and interpretive projects affirming the longstanding significance of the past at America's national parks. The same study, however, acknowledged that the agency's stated intention to become the country's premier public classroom remains handicapped by a "weak support for its history workforce, by agency structures that confine history in isolated silos, by longstanding funding deficiencies, by often narrow and static conceptions of history's scope, and by timid interpretation."[94] Challenges imposed by budgetary constraints, bureaucratic obligations, and professional stagnation are considerable, and moving beyond the longstanding general preference for fixed (and timid) interpretations remains difficult. Significant progress notwithstanding, the NPS continues to generally follow the path of least resistance regarding interpretation and presentation; it treats "past controversies with caution" and favors "interpretive themes that will not rock any boats," reported the study's survey respondents.[95] Such "safe" interpretations, in light of changing demographics and historiographic approaches, remain inefficient in engaging the complex richness of NPS properties and unappealing to a diverse population.

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in the realm of cultural landscapes, see Manish Chalana, "With Heritage So Wild: Cultural Landscape Inventory in United States National Parks," *Preservation Education and Research* 3 (2010): 1–16. On underrepresented themes (such as mining, immigration, and technology) in the western NPS portfolio, see Lary M. Dilsaver, "National Significance: Representation of the West in the National Park System," in *Western Places, American Myths*, ed. Gary Hausladen (Reno: University of Nevada, 2003), 111–32. Dilsaver laments the fact that so many NPS units "treat Indian culture as a sidebar to their interpretation of natural features or American historical processes," rather than in their own right or as contemporary cultures; quotation on 118.

93 Thomas Curwen, "'So It Won't Happen Again': How the Descendants Remember the Sand Creek Massacre," *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 2016. On the representation of Native Americans of the West see Akim D. Reinhardt, "Native America: The Indigenous West," in *Western Places,* 184–203; and Francis Flavin, "Native Americans and American History" (2005), https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/resedu/native_americans.pdf.

94 Whisnant et al., *Imperiled Promise*, 5. See also Edwin Bearss, "The National Park Service and Its History Program: 1864–1986," *The Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1987): 10–18.

95 Whisnant et al., *Imperiled Promise*, 110. Many professional NPS historians at the time believed that rigorously practiced history within the Park Service was systematically "underfunded, undervalued, underutilized and misunderstood" because natural and wildlife conservation efforts in flagship parks commanded the majority of agency resources. See page 53.

The case of SJI-NHP has the potential to illustrate and better emphasize messages of international diplomacy through peaceful negotiations that are particularly relevant in post-9/11 America, while also exploring themes of conquest and colonialism. These messages are largely lost in the park's open landscapes, visitor center exhibits, signage, and particularly in the surviving built environments of its isolated military encampment sites. Additional themes that challenge the concept of manifest destiny that led to the dispossession of Native communities associated with the islands remain peripheral. On the other hand, the WM-NHS has cautiously considered highly conflicting perspectives on history and race relations. Although much of the interpretive material on the grounds (outside the museum) continues to focus on the work of the Oregon missionaries and discusses the conflicts between the Native peoples and the settlers in relatively binary terms, ongoing reinterpretation projects are promising. Dedicated funding for such efforts at WM-NHS, and system-wide, would undoubtedly help in revamping existing interpretive programs.[96] The NPS is clearly trying to maintain the relevance of its properties in light of today's changing demographics and civic educational contexts, but at times its interpretative materials betray an ongoing struggle between founding mandates and contemporary themes of interest to wider audiences.

Diversity itself remains a critical issue of course, not just in storytelling and interpretive priorities, but also in staffing and outreach. Indeed, this is not a new issue, and observers and advocates have long since lamented the off-putting perception of the NPS as an exclusive agency whose parks are unwelcoming to minority visitors.[97] Visitation data for NPS sites from 2011 reveal that visitors were disproportionately white (78 percent) and that little had changed regarding the relative dominance of this group since 2000.[98] The disparity between an NPS administration that is nearly 80 percent white and a national population set to become majority nonwhite by 2044 remains a weakness.[99] Even as NPS has made diversity a priority, changes have been slow, leading to growing concerns over the agency's commitment

96 On funding deficiencies at the NPS, see Nathan Rott, "National Parks Have a Long To-do List But Can't Cover the Repair Costs," *Morning Edition*, National Public Radio website, March 8, 2016, http://www.npr.org/2016/03/08/466461595/national-parks-have-a-long-to-do-list-but-cant-cover-the-repair-costs.

97 For example, Nathan Bierma, "Our National Parks: Why Are They So White?" *Chicago Tribune*, September 27, 2002. The general omission of minorities from the NPS's centennial celebration film (*National Parks Adventure*, 2016) functions as an unsurprising and "continuing indictment of the National Park Service's overwhelming whiteness," said one critic. See Glenn Nelson, "Whiteness Reigns in a New Film Celebrating National Parks," *High Country News*, March 7, 2016.

98 National Park Service, *National Park Service Comprehensive Survey of the American Public 2008–2009: Racial and Ethnic Diversity of National Park System Visitors and Non-Visitors* (Laramie, WY: University of Wyoming, 2011). See also Nathan Rott, "Don't Care About National Parks? The Park Service Needs You To," *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio website, March 9, 2016, http://www.npr.org/2016/03/09/463851006/dont-care-about-national-parks-the-park-service-needs-you-to. For data on diversity in users from earlier periods, see M. F. Floyd, "Race, Ethnicity and Use of the National Park System," *Social Science Research Review* 1, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1999): 1–24.

99 Glenn Nelson, "Why Are Our Parks So White?" *New York Times*, July 10, 2015.

to a more diversified workforce.[100] Instead of offering free passes and expanded wireless internet zones, journalist Glenn Nelson urges the NPS to more aggressively "shout to minorities from its iconic mountaintops, 'We want you here!'" while actively diversifying its own ranks.[101] Indeed, increasing diversity among agency employees would likely improve the agency's ability to better articulate authentic, inclusive messages more relevant and inviting for populations currently underrepresented and underserved.

The 2016 NPS centennial is indeed an appropriate time to reflect on the need for and value of expanded interpretive narratives within the founding mandate framework. As noted in the *Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century* report (2001), it is the duty of the NPS "to proclaim anew the meaning and value of parks, conservation, and recreation; to expand the learning and research occurring in parks and share that knowledge broadly; and to encourage all Americans to experience these special places."[102] Progress was insufficient a decade later, as demonstrated by *Imperiled Promise*. The shortcoming observed then—that the agency lacked "a coordinated approach to controversial interpretation that would enable it to embrace and turn controversies into educational opportunities"—still does not appear to have yet been comprehensively addressed or implemented.[103] An honest and thorough process of self-study to identify best practices and mitigate weaknesses must continue to follow Tilden's compelling assertion that "the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation."[104] In this spirit, one NPS historian has rightfully suggested that the agency staff should "step back from the position of authority and become provokers, facilitators and encourage the public to engage with . . . [historical] material, consider multiple perspectives, and make their own choices."[105]

Ultimately, the NPS intends in its second century to fortify its credibility and flexibility with regard to difficult topics and to "engage . . . in ongoing dialogue with openness, sensitivity, and honesty" in order to "tell stories faithfully, completely, and accurately."[106] This necessary process will require substantial resources dedicated to expanding its portfolio of properties and modifying (both online and on-site) interpretation of existing units, in order to facilitate the development of increasingly diverse discourses and multiple readings of shared histories. Broadening interpretation would require the NPS to embrace the fact that the socially

100 Rott, "Don't Care About National Parks."

101 Ibid.

102 National Park Service Advisory Board, National Park Service website, "Rethinking National Parks for the 21st Century," http://www.nps.gov/policy/report.htm.

103 Whisnant et al., *Imperiled Promise,* 111.

104 Tilden, *Interpreting,* 35.

105 Whisnant et al., *Imperiled Promise,* 111.

106 Mitchell et al., *Keeping National Parks*, 7. A 1987 assessment of NPS interpretation quality concluded that "It is safe to say that Park presentations have been a good deal better than most other popular treatments of history," and although "it may not tell the whole story . . . it has told most of its part of the story well." Mackintosh, "National Park Service," 63.

constructed "sense of place" that inspires normative interpretations of its properties must be allowed to shift. The process of reframing and expanding diversity, missions, and interpretations is possible because "places are always in the process of being created, always provisional and uncertain, and always capable of being discursively manipulated towards desired (individual or collective) ends," provided the will to do so can overcome the resistance of complacency or ignorance.[107]

Entering the museum at the WM-NHS, one is first confronted by a posted quotation by Thomas Sowell reminding visitors that "Cultures are not 'superior' or 'inferior.' They are for better or worse adapted to a particular set of circumstances."[108] That message, so meaningful in the context of the Whitman Mission, applies far more broadly to the entire NPS system, and in particular to sites engaging nationally significant and contested histories. Current circumstances—demographic, cultural, historiographic, professional—are changing, and so too must our approach to understanding and presenting our shared heritage. Both WM-NHS and SJI-NHP, like so many other NPS parks, maintain considerable potential as manifestations of conflicted pasts, despite their constraining mandates. Into their erstwhile "frozen" landscapes and limited interpretive presentations may yet be instilled more diverse perspectives and fuller, more compelling accounts that resonate more meaningfully with today's (and tomorrow's) constituents. If the NPS is to retain its much-extolled status as America's preeminent public classroom, they must be.

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107 On "sense of place" scholarship, see Patricia Stokowski, "Languages of Place and Discourses of Power: Constructing New Senses of Place," *Journal of Leisure Research* 34, no. 4 (Fourth Quarter 2002): 368–82.

108 Quotation attributed in the museum display to Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).